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'THE RECREATIONS OF A COUNTRY PARSON'

THIRD SERIES

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I.

HOLIDAY-TIME.

"And He said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile."—ST MARK vi. 31.

OUR Saviour had, some time before, called to Him His twelve Apostles, and had sent them out two and two on what we now call a Mission: and they had gone. We do not know with what feelings one of them went; and preached, like the others, *that men should repent:* for *that* was the sum of their present preaching. We wonder if any souls were helped, and bettered permanently, by Judas. We wonder if he was able so to delude himself as to think the work congenial. We wonder if, without any self-deception, he was for the time warmed up to a pitch at which he felt it so. It is an awful question, What is the outcome and upshot of the work of a preacher who, after having preached to others, proves a castaway.

They had a busy time, the twelve. It was not, any more than the preacher's work now, a work for indolent men. It was not a work for shy men; it was not a work for timid men. They had not merely, with all

due and decorous formality, to enter a pulpit from which they were expected to preach: They had to extemporize time and place, and to speak to their fellow-men when and where they could find them. Many a preacher who can do his work decently enough now, would have found that pull too much for him. The Apostles, indeed, were wonderfully equipped for their work. They were given great powers. Specially they had the supreme power (would God that His ministers had it now!) to cast out unclean spirits; to bring back the morbid and miserable soul to cheerfulness and sound health: to bid away causeless gloom, needless fears, perverse and twisted views, unhappy tempers, insane impulses and tendencies, feverish exhilarations and depressions: all these wretched products of an advanced civilisation through which it comes that almost every highly-educated and finely-strung human being is more or less mad. Then the needs of these first Christian preachers were effectually provided for, though they carried with them no provision. And further, they were given an awful authority: more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for such as would not hear *them*. After all this, there is no surprise that the mission was a successful one. And there could not be conflicting beliefs as to some of its issues: these were manifest to everybody. For not only did the Apostles preach that men should repent. Men might repent or no. People about

might believe they had repented, or no. But there could be no mistake when many sick were healed; and little uncertainty when many devils were cast out, and the well-known signs of their indwelling disappeared. We humbly trust, permanently disappeared.

The mission ended. Such special efforts must begin and end. Neither for the worker's sake, nor for the sake of those worked upon, is it expedient that they should be other than temporary. The preachers came back, they gathered about their Divine Master, they told Him (how naturally) "all things:" they poured out their story in His sympathetic ear; "both what they had done, and what they had taught." The kind Saviour saw that the whole mission had been a heavy pull on their energies, both of body and mind. He saw that they were wrought up to a pitch of excitement. He saw that they were weary, and fevered, and nervously over-wrought. And the first words He is recorded to have said to them were kind words, wise words, sympathetic words. He saw they needed rest after toil, and quiet after excitement. He knew where they would get these. Not by sitting still and doing nothing for a space amid the throng of men, coming and going. Not there. They must get apart into the calm seclusion of nature, where green hills and green trees and rippling streams should speak to their heart. "Much grass," humblest, commonest, most beautiful of all vegetation, would pour its gentle

refreshment into weary eyes and aching brain. They must get quite away from the work they had been doing: They must have a total change, if but for a little, in their mode of life. The labourer had earned his rest: he needed it, and he deserved it. And he would go back fitter, wiser, hopefuller, stronger, to his work, for his rest. And so our blessed Redeemer's words are to the out-worn, wrought-up Apostles, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile."

They were wise and kind words, even then, when life was not hurried as it is now: when there did not come, each morning, the hot news of the feverish world's fretful fever: when journeys were times of leisurely thought: when letters rarely came: when worry was not yet grown the great characteristic of daily life. But far more needful now has the counsel grown which is set forth in my text. Never, in the history of this country, have there been days in which the work of cultured men was so hard, so eager, so exhausting, so perilous to fagged brain and nerves, to fevered soul and spirit. How early men break down now, in professions once deemed leisurely and restful! How lined and care-marked are many faces, how trembling many hands, among classes where the suggestion of being over-driven and prematurely worn-out and broken-down would forty years since have appeared ridiculous: How many invaluable lives are cut short; what inestimable services lost to a world

that sorely needs them; in Church, in politics, in business, in letters! And there is a feverishness, a tremulous eagerness (as it were) about the thoughts of many of our most conscientious thinkers, and about all their work, which makes one sure that if Christ were here as of old, and looked upon them, He would say to them such words as those of my text: Come away from this crowd of human beings; Come away from this over-pressure and hurry of engagements: Come apart to a desert place, to the silent hills, to the lonely shore: Come and rest awhile; you need quiet that you may see your way.

The wisdom and needfulness of our Saviour's counsel are in these days practically acknowledged: the counsel is in some measure obeyed by very many. This is the Holiday season of brain-driving men. All over Britain, there is in these autumn days a blink of leisure in many busy lives, a blink of quiet in many excited lives; and the needful refreshment of entire change of scene and air. The statesman, the lawyer, the merchant-prince, and the merchant who is not a prince, turn their back upon the places of their daily excitements. And it is pleasant to find that God's Holy Book does not fail to have its word of frank recognition of this great necessity.

Our Saviour, you see, frankly recognised it: He who "knoweth our frame," He who "knew what was in man." We cannot always drive on at our work; unless indeed we are so happy as to have very

leisurely work, that allows considerable spaces of unanxious recreation in every day. We get wearied: the work, even the most congenial and best-loved work, drags: it loses its zest. It is not heartily nor cheerfully done; and there is always the sense of something lacking about the results of work, however painstaking and conscientious, which is not done heartily and cheerfully. But after due rest, the appetite for work returns, the enjoyment of it returns: you go at it with a will, and half the labour gives twice the result. It is not a task now, but a pleasure. But there is much more and worse than mere weariness, that comes of the too long continuance of unvaried toil. You get feverish: all manner of morbid views and tempers take possession of you: you get into twisted and crotchety ways of looking at things and judging of people. I could give you most curious examples: but that is exactly what I am not going to do. Well, take one instance of what I mean by a morbid way of looking at things, which you may find in a book, a generally healthful and cheerful book, by a man whom nobody here ever saw.* He tells us there that he could not bear to plant a tree, because every time he passed it, it seemed to be crying out to him, "Ah, you'll be dead, you'll be dead, you'll be dead, before I shall be full-grown." Now, the tree would be saying quite true: but a man is in a wrong way if *that* is all the beautiful living and

* *Notes of Thought:* By the late Charles Buxton, M.P., p. 276.

growing leaves and branches say to him. Then, all gloomy fears, and forebodings, are morbid: that is, they come of mental unhealth. They come of forgetfulness of the kind Providence that is over us. "My times are in Thy Hand," is the right thing; "and the changes that are sure to come, I do not fear to see;" but not Christ's own command to His people, that they "take no thought for the morrow," that they "cast all their care on Him," will be of the least good to you, till you, by obeying His physical laws, get out of that bodily and mental unhealth that blackens every prospect. And you grow out of that, by rest: rest with God's blessing on it. But you will neither reason nor pray yourself out of it; if you neglect God's plain command, to rest. There are many things around us, in God's inscrutable government of His world, which we may make ourselves miserable by thinking of perpetually: there are possibilities and certainties hanging over our own lives, drawing nearer daily, on which it can do no good to dwell. It was not like the cheerful Sydney Smith to write to his brother, "We shall be a brown, infragrant powder, in forty years." We should seek to wisely indurate ourselves, and "take short views." The Lord will provide: and His way must be the right way: and the healthy mind holds to these blessed truths, the morbid mind cannot. Thank God, the soul sets itself right, in rest. It gets back to calm views: to healthful feelings: it learns to look at things in the normal, healthful way.

Dear friends, there is no better spent time in the best-spent life, than the time of needful relaxation. There is no more useful part of the busiest life, none on which a man may with better heart ask God's blessing, than the season of utter idleness amid Highland heather or Alpine snows. There is no more sacred duty than the duty of rest: God shews us He thinks so by making such grand and varied good come of it;—soundness, cheerfulness, sometimes even amid mature cares what might almost be called happiness,—and then, fitness for renewed and increased usefulness again. That is how God shows His approval of what we do: By causing that it makes us useful, cheerful, and happy: happy with the calm happiness of an approving conscience: brightened with the most beautiful thing on this earth, the smile upon the face of duty!

I have not said, so far, that this blessed rest is the due reward of labour past. And a special truth is, that this reward can never come save to him who deserves it. "The end of work," said Aristotle, "is to enjoy rest:" but, to enjoy rest, you must have gone through work. The idle and useless person can never know rest. There is no such thing for him. It will not come to him: He cannot find it in this world. He may go and do nothing: but *that* is not rest to a person who is always doing nothing. And further, as many know, when we are no longer worried and bustled out of our spirituality, devout and holy feeling

finds its congenial hour. We thank God, and take courage. We trust God, and take courage. The heart is lifted up: there is no more accurate way of stating the fact than in that old traditional phrase. And the heart is warmed: "The calm retreat, the silent shade, with prayer and praise agree." We look back, and think of many things, and of many old familiar faces, which we ought not to be forgetting: but which are crowded out of our hearts in busier days. The grey-haired father and mother that are gone; the bright-faced little one whom Jesus, as of old, called to Himself: schoolboy scenes, and early friends: the sacred communions, the first we saw: how vividly they all come back to us!

Now Christ tells us that time by time we ought to have such seasons of rest. But that is not enough. There must be change of scene too, if we would have all the good of such days: "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile." We must get away from the scenes and the people among whom we commonly live. We must let our souls come under the quiet influences of Nature. We cannot receive her healthful teachings, we cannot discern the expression of her face, unless in some degree of leisure. The crisp September morning air: the yellow fields and the green hedges: the dark lake and the purple mountain: there is a mighty sum of things for ever gazing upon us, and for ever speaking, if we will mark, hear, and learn. The voice of our Saviour, Who

made them, speaks to our hearts through all these: and it is good for us to remember, what many forget, that the Sermon on the Mount, and the Stories of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan, are from the self-same Author with this golden and green and gleaming page of natural beauty and bounty that is spread wide before us in these bright autumn days. It mends us, it calms us, it cheers us, we hardly know how: as a purer blood comes to the heart, so kindlier and gentler thoughts to the soul. We see things in right perspective: we discern what molehills they are that had seemed mountains: we learn to smile at what once made us angry: and to bear charitably with folk whom once we could not bear. The teachings of the wilderness are discerned to be identical, as concerns our daily life and duty, with the teachings of the New Testament: and both are felt to be summed in trust and love towards God, and in kindly charity towards man. What uninspired man ever taught us lessons of more Christian wisdom than that chiefest poet, who had learned what he taught us in the unhurried school of sacred Nature: drinking in at every pore the spirit of the season and the scene; and giving out what Nature had instilled in teachings of truthfulness, purity, and sympathy, of piety towards God, of devotion towards Christ!

One wonders how our Redeemer and His Apostles would rest. Probably as other wearied men would.

At first, pure idleness. To the worn-out, that is absolute rest. Body and soul cry aloud for it. Those preachers had been driven hard in heart and brain: For awhile, it would be delightful just to do nothing. Only to rest and be thankful. But after a little time, that will not do. Unless you be a very sloth by nature, your mind will demand occupation. Your mind is like the fabled familiar spirit: you must find it employment, or it will make you miserable. And the problem before the man who has a time of rest is, How to both get the good of the Holiday-season, and to be happy in it. Many people, if the truth were known, do not really enjoy the longed-for holiday. They get the good of it: They go back to their work, rested; and thankful indeed to take to work again: but they have not enjoyed it while it was going over. It was, in fact, very irksome and disappointing. Now, How shall we well and wisely rest? How shall we well and wisely do nothing? How shall a man spend his holiday in the Highlands; and not come back sick and weary of the sombre green and purple heather? How shall a man spend September at St Andrews; and not go away weary of the wide sands and the green Links and the broad Bay?

All guidance of the soul is difficult. And the soul is never rightly guided unless under a true religious feeling and sanction. In all things, little and great, the powers of the soul will not go right unless under

influence and direction from above: let me say distinctly, under the guidance of the Third Person in the Godhead, the Holy Spirit. We constantly forget this, when we are trying to discipline our minds. Now, each of us, by asking, may have that Divine Being to advise him at every hour of the day: but as for details of conduct, it is not wise that grown-up folk should seek for any further direction than their own best discretion and the Holy Spirit. There is, you know, a great Organisation which will undertake the entire direction of your soul in all circumstances: will tell you what to do down to the least detail of your conduct: and, among other things, will instruct you how to spend every hour of your yearly escape from daily toil. It does indeed call it a Retreat, not a Holiday: and it provides very clever men who will take charge of every feeling of your heart throughout it. But that system has not worked well. It has worked extremely ill: and that in divers ways. All that we attempt, in directing human souls, is to lay down general principles, which reasonable people may apply to their own case.

Many folk, when disappointed by the long-looked-for resting-season, are disposed to think that we all learnt, as boys, that things in this world do not come up to our expectation: and here is the old experience again. But it is not God's purpose that we should just sit down and make up our mind that we must be disappointed in everything here. It is many

times through our own fault that we are disappointed. We might make more of many things than we do, if we set ourselves wisely to it. And God intends that we should make the most of all His gifts.

Now, it is a mistake to think that, after much work and worry, you have only to go away to some quiet place and do nothing, and then you will feel happy. It is in our make, that when driven by hard toil, and perplexed, and overburdened, we think we should be all right if we could but escape from all this: "Oh that I had wings like a dove! then would I fly away and be at rest." It is natural to think that the reverse of what we find painful must be pleasant. But if brain and nerves have been long overdriven, it is very likely that in the first blink of idleness you may find yourself worse, more depressed, more irritable, than when you were kept at work, and the strain still upon you. Let every weary mortal, entering on his resting-time, provide some occupation for it. Travel, specially if in strange countries, provides its own occupation: but if you are to go apart to a quiet spot, and rest like the Apostles, see you provide something for the mind to do. Let there be a little work, each day. There are those who can find work which is also play: they are fortunate. The heather sees many such: nor are they unknown nearer home. To others, even a fixed task of solid reading daily: worthy books kept for such a time, which educated folk ought to read, but which nobody would read for

pleasure; are excellent towards keeping the mind's tone. I go into no details; but I say, generally, and say it with confidence: I am sure the counsel is right, and I have seen the need of it: If you have been long overdriven, overtaxed in brain-work, do not do nothing: or your resting-time will make you worse before it makes you better. You may come back to your work, refreshed; but you will not have enjoyed your rest. You will remember the time as a gloomy one; and you will hate the place.

And finally, if you would enjoy it; if you would come back from it with a soul set right; wiser, calmer, more hopeful, more charitable; to do your work better and more cheerfully, to bear with less irritation the provocations which all earnest people will know, all who desire to mend things and folk around them; see to it you make the resting-time a time of distinct religious discipline. French men and women, a century since, used to talk of going into retirement to *make their soul:* such was their curious phrase. We see what they mean, though it was awkwardly expressed. We too must take ourselves seriously in hand when God gives us a little breathing space. It is a great thing to keep ever in view that all the singular mental experiences with which we grow familiar as we go on through life, are to be brought to Christ, and kept by the Blessed Spirit. Let us not think that from our own resources good will come to us: we must have the help of other minds, and of

sacred Nature: but far above all else, and along with all else, the calming, elevating, purifying, sweetening, brightening communications, poured into heart and mind, of the Holy Spirit of God. No spiritual discipline is healthful, but that which He orders and directs: No mind is sound, no heart is right, save those wherein He permeates every faculty and every affection. Let us seek, let us pray, that He be sensibly given to us in those quiet times when we are readier to welcome Him, and more alive to His gracious presence. We are not now taught that to forget the active duties of this life is the best preparation for the next: It is by faithful and godly doing of the work of this world that we make ourselves for a better. And yet, how helpful the unhurried days in which we may deliberately set ourselves to the care of many things in our spiritual life. There is the solemn questioning, How much is there real about our religion: how much that would abide if scaffoldings and props were taken away: How much would there be to hold us up if we were told we must in a day or two die? There is the looking-back over our life, passing so fast away: thinking what we have made of it; and then going and seeking God's forgiveness of it all. There is the informal, short, urgent prayer, that is the outcome of our great necessity: sent up without very much ceasing; sent up pretty nearly everywhere!

SEPTEMBER 5, 1875.

II.

CHURCH MUSIC.

"And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him."—2 KINGS iii. 15.

THERE was a bad king who came one day to the prophet Elisha to inquire of God through him. The bad king came under stress of necessity: he would not have come if he could have helped it: his feeling about going to God's prophet was a good deal like the feeling of a somewhat graceless person about going to church. Elisha knew all this; and he spoke sharply to the king. He told the king he had better be off to the false prophets of his wicked father and mother. He told the king that he would not look at him nor listen to him but for the sake of a good king who had come with him. The plush, plainly, had not entered into that brave prophet's soul. I do not need to justify Elisha in speaking as he did: perhaps in his entire tone there was some measure of human irritability, such as lingers long in finely-strung natures. But that is neither here nor there. In any case, you can see he was

ruffled and heated; and he felt he was in no fit frame to receive divine communications and impressions. The angry heart shuts out, while it remains angry, the gracious Spirit of God. So the prophet felt he must be soothed; and, taught doubtless by former experience, he thought of the power of Music. He called for a minstrel to play before him; and the skilful musician came. The gentle strains calmed nerves and heart, soul and spirit. All painful excitement faded away. While the minstrel played, the inspired record tells us, the hand of the Lord came upon the prophet, and he was able to receive God's message, and express it to others. You see, it was when Elisha was thus by natural means prepared to welcome it, the Divine inspiration came. Something must come from above, beyond the prophet's power to bring; but at least he could prepare himself to receive it. And he did prepare himself; and then the supernatural something came.

I see in that story a great and much-needed lesson for each of us: a lesson to be remembered always, and specially when we enter the sacred place appointed for common praise and prayer. I learn from that story that it is fit we seek by natural means to soothe and calm ourselves into a favourable mood to welcome the gracious influences of that Blessed Spirit without Whom we can neither pray nor praise. We cannot worship aright unless by the grace of God's Spirit. We cannot do anything aright, unless

by the grace of God's Spirit. But we can take pains to bring our minds to such a state that we shall be ready to receive God's grace. And there is no natural means, there is no influence acting on the better and purer part of what is merely natural in us, which will do *that* in the case of nine hundred and ninety human beings in every thousand, like music. What helped God's prophet, twenty-eight centuries since, is the thing to help God's worshipping people to-day.

It is a fact that shews us how pure, excellent, elevated is God's worship, that (as we all know quite well) it is when we are in our own very best mood we rise to it most naturally and easily. When we are at our very best,—our kindest, gentlest, most right-thinking,—we most naturally and easily turn to praise and prayer. It is then we see God's hand in nature's beauty; it is then that among green leaves and fragrant flowers, under the sunshiny sky, we look round and say, "Thou hast made summer." You cannot worship rightly if you are angry. It was anger that was the matter with Elisha. Even righteous anger quenches devotion as water quenches fire. Nor can you worship rightly if at the moment you are distracted with care; if you are awfully worried. Nor can you worship rightly if you are in a feverish hurry of spirits; you must be calm. All this makes one feel how much each Christian, even in regard to his spiritual life, is in the power of his fellow-creatures,

to help or hinder. Not merely a clever malignant person, but even a blundering stupid person, may so speak to a neighbour as to make him very unfit to pray: may stir up the worst that is in him, by bringing in a sore subject, by suggesting suspicions of those around, by retailing wretched tattle that rouses angry contempt,—all going so much to ruffle even an able and good man as to banish all devotion for the while. For, as a wretched gad-fly may madden a noble horse, so may the most despicable human being spiritually harm the very best and worthiest. Any man of tolerable discernment and capacity, who knows a neighbour well, of course knows his weak points, his pet prejudices, his keen natural antipathies, his sensitive unprotected places: and knowing these, can, without the slightest infraction of the rules of polite intercourse, get at his neighbour, and rile him up, and do him great spiritual harm. And, so doing, would be doing the very devil's work.

Now, my text suggests to us, that in God's worship (my subject to-day shall be only *that*), we should try to have all natural surroundings favourable to us; so that we may start fair when we seek to rise to what is above mere nature.

This is a large matter. I might well begin earlier; but let us begin with Saturday night. Try to finish up all matters of business, all little household details, as early in the afternoon as may be, that you may spend the evening quietly and thankfully; as a season

of preparation. With some, this cannot be, I know. Let such try to end (at least) the week's work and care with the last week-day; and not carry any worldly matter over to be thought of and settled on the Sunday. Let all ask God's kind blessing in a good night's sleep, that they may rise on the Lord's day in a pleasant frame of mind; cheerful, hopeful, kindly. Avoid, on Sunday morning, all ruffling topics of conversation: all disquieting thoughts. Be sure it is your duty to hallow the blessed season by excluding these. This is very considerably within your own will to do; ask the Holy Spirit to shut disquiet out completely. He will do so, most Sundays, if you ask. Then, on no consideration, go to a church where divine service is to be conducted by a minister whom you do not respect or believe in. To do that will exert on you a cross-influence of the very worst and most harmful kind; specially with us, where the entire service is tinctured, far too much, with the officiating minister's personal characteristics. I trust none of you ever come to church when I am to preach, unwillingly because you think you must. Don't come here if you would rather go elsewhere. Never dream that you will give me offence. I am not afraid of having to do so, but, if need were, I would infinitely rather preach to a small sympathetic congregation than to a large unwilling one. I have spoken of liking; but, above all, let no Christian attend the ministrations of one in whom he does not believe. Such a one would re-

frigerate you; deaden you; kill out your better life. Then, when you have come to church, silently asking God to grant you (according to long-familiar phrase, easily understood by any who want to understand it) to be "in the Spirit on the Lord's day," how pleasant, how helpful it is, when everything about the sacred place is seemly and decorous. I do not ask that things should be grand—every one cannot have that. I could wish, indeed, that all our churches were like Glasgow Cathedral; so lovely, so majestic, so awe-inspiring; but that is a vain wish. Yet decency may be in the humblest country parish—squalor or dirt should be tolerated nowhere: to be clean costs not much; and a simple grace and beauty might surely be afforded everywhere. After all, the chief thing about a church is the congregation; and nothing will more powerfully help us in our endeavours to draw near to God, nothing under His own blessed Spirit, than to find ourselves in the midst of many like-minded, all manifestly and heartily joining in the same hallowed work. There is something very dreary and disheartening about an empty, or even a half-empty church. It commonly indicates a very low condition of spiritual life around it; and to every Christian *that* is just the saddest of all sad things. Who is there here but sympathises most deeply with good ministers of the Church; not many—yet too many, to whom is appointed the great discouragement and trial, through no fault of their own, to minister in

such cheerless charges? I know, God be thanked for it, that, even amid the most adverse surroundings, the Holy Ghost can make a very little flock worship heartily and happily: but then He has all the more to do. Now, I do not say what a grand sight this church would be—for that would be to suggest a very poor and inferior reflection—but I do say, what a help, what a warming, lifting-up thing it would be, to every worshipper in it, if, at each service held in it, every soul were here present that ought to be.

Then, being assembled in God's house, it is a great step towards offering spiritual worship, if every worshipper, remembering in Whose presence he is, aim at the deepest reverence of manner: look as if he meant, gravely and earnestly, to worship the heart-searching God. A little levity on the part of a thoughtless few may jar the devotion of many. I mention this, and no more: for I testify thankfully that I have hardly ever, after serving the church for twenty-three years, witnessed irreverence anywhere. Yet let me name a devout observance, which would help us all. Let me beg of you, when you have reached your places in church, to bend your head just for a minute in silent prayer. Pray for yourself, for all the congregation, for the minister. You do not know how much good it may do, how much help it may bring. So, when the service is over, the blessing said, just a minute's silent pause, and ask for a blessing on another opportunity of grace, gone for

ever. You will not deny me that great help, when I now ask it of you. When the last audible word of worship has been spoken, how solemn, how beautiful it is when, instead of the ugly rush which is seen too often, all the congregation bow their heads for that hushed minute in unspoken prayer! When I go back once in the year, and preach in my former church on the communion evening, there is always something profoundly impressive in the great congregation, the beautiful and hearty music; but there is not a thing, from first to last, that touches me more than the dead silence of the multitude for just that solemn minute when the last Amen is said. You feel, in that audible hush, that all hearts are being lifted up in separate, but most earnest and prevailing prayer. You feel that the poor imperfect service is being reinforced and backed up by what may make it mighty to help and cheer. I never asked anything for myself of the congregation before. But I do not shrink from asking this:—Pray for us, brethren, pray.

But the special thought suggested to-day by the text is the help there is in music towards preparing the soul for receiving God's Spirit. I know that in these days, more especially beyond the Atlantic, the wisest and holiest of Christian people have found out this mighty power, and many are using it as it never was used before. I do no more than allude to recent strong religious movements, in which I willingly believe there has been much good combined with much which appears

to me most objectionable in point of good taste and good sense, to remind you to what a great degree the impressions made have come of the abundant use of sacred song. "Music," says the most influential American preacher, "is the preacher's prime minister. It is the function of music to begin at the point at which the sermon ends. That instructs, that invites to emotion through the reason. Now comes music, following it up, and inviting to emotion, through the imagination, through the taste, through the feelings; and it takes and renders substantial the same truths which may have been expressed dogmatically." Of course, I feel a difficulty here. If there are people who do not care at all for music—who do not feel it lift them up, and warm their hearts—I need not speak of this matter to them. They cannot understand this. But of such there are very few. There are almost none. We sympathise with them deeply. They lose not merely a great refining enjoyment daily, but a great help in worshipping God. It is a sad privation; and it must needs be mended before entering heaven, where song is so much. Thank God, with most, this benign influence is available. It is waiting to lift up the heart, to calm the mind, to give some glimpse of a higher state. You remember how, in old Scotch phrase now seldom heard, the congregation used to be invited to *compose their minds to the worship of God* by singing the opening psalm. One forgot the meaning, as one forgets the original force of familiar phrases; but there

is touching recognition in it of what in Scotland is too commonly forgot, this one among all the purposes of public praise. The good men who first began Divine Service with these words must have thought of my text. So must the good men who first thought of another observance, which you find now in very many of our churches over the land: in those of our churches wherein abides that glorious Instrument, the chiefest invention of many minds and many ages, whose very tones rebuke lightness or frivolity; which dwells ever most fitly in the house of God; which refuses to lend itself, unless most unwillingly, to any other use than that in sacred song, lifted up to the praise of our blessed Redeemer. You know the meaning of the opening voluntary, played before worship begins. It is meant to help you, entering God's house, to cast petty cares behind you; and many know well how those solemn sounds, flooding the sacred place as we enter it, smooth away little irritations and distractions from mind and heart, and bring us to that calm, unworldly mood from which it is easier to rise (by God's grace) to true and devout worship. It is just Elisha's minstrel over again, only, of course, a thousand times better. And, truly, the grandest music is essentially sacred; it is an emanation from a higher sphere of mind; it is an expression of faith and hope: it is vitally prayer and praise, in every pure and upward-looking human spirit. Even the desolate atheist who a little while since died —that miserable Strauss who was sure of nothing be-

yond what his five senses could tell him—got from this divine effluence a glimpse of something better. "Yea, verily," says he, "in the ocean of harmony in which we are enisled by our great composers, all earthly woe vanishes and dissolves; and, as if by magic, we see all those stains removed, which otherwise, with all our labour, we cannot wipe away." I know there are folk who may judge all this to be transcendental. Let them be assured that though it transcend their understanding, it is to many real as any solid fact.

But then, some may say, is not all this beyond the homely possibilities of a plain Scotch church: is not all this quite beyond the pitch to be attained by simple psalm-tunes? The answer is ready—all this is thoroughly within our reach. It needs not that the music be Handel's or Mendelssohn's: it needs not that the church be Westminster or St Peter's; I never heard more touching or elevating strains than went up from an Ayrshire congregation worshipping under the blue heaven on a communion evening in July: Coleshill or Martyrdom will do it, and "Such pity as a father hath unto his children dear." All that is wanted is that every soul in the congregation should sing with all his heart and voice, and as in Christ's presence, and even without those helps which are most assuredly coming, we shall bless God for the great help of a grand and soul-uplifting praise. Only "Let all the people praise Him," and we shall have all we need. A choir is well to lead—it is impossible

in a church of any size to do without it—but the singing of the most cultivated choir is a miserable and shivery thing when the congregation is dumb. It is the bounden duty of every one who has ear and voice to help in praise. Suppose I stood up here, and gave out my text, and having done so, lounged here listlessly for half-an-hour and said nothing; if you did not think I had lost my wits, you would think I was grossly failing in my duty. Not worse by a pennyworth than you do, every one of you, that is able to sing, yet stands up at praise and does not sing. We never shall have our worship all it ought to be till each worshipper rouses himself to join in the service as though the whole service depended on himself. That is what makes hearty worship, to aid in which God's Spirit would surely come. Every boy in the choir should sing his part as if everything were to be done by him alone. And so every soul in the congregation, men and women. Then what a banishing there would be of too-common listlessness; what an access of life would come! An eminent ruler in this congregation and university,* who lately visited America, tells that there is a craving over there on the part of the congregation for some direct share in the worship; there is a rapidly-growing dislike to the exclusive performance of everything by the minister. It is a most healthy feeling. I thank God for it; and I believe He will soon send it here, too. You will

* Principal Tulloch.

not always stand being prayed for, and preached to: having everything in church done for you; and being helplessly in the hands of the minister to say in your name what he likes. Indeed, it is remarkable how, at those prayer-meetings (as they are called) which are held in many places, people listen with freshened interest to the poorest rubbish talked by any non-clerical person who tries to say something: as though feeling the great relief of any variety, as though feeling the fitness of others than mere official men taking part. But meanwhile, with our worship just as it is, you have your share in which you join with voice as well as heart. It is too small a share: wherefore see you make the very most and best of it, that helpful and beautiful exercise of praise. Join in it skilfully; join in it heartily; join in it all of you! There will be new meaning, now little thought of by many, in the words of the good Psalmist, "O come, let us sing unto the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms." And then how naturally and warmly we should lift up the heart in prayer! How heartily would minister preach and people hear! And mounting up, as it were, nearer to God all through the worship, we should raise our voices at the last in the jubilant anthem, and go away lifted up to supremest thankfulness and faith!

But that, perhaps, is a devout imagination: a fair

ideal, as yet far away. I do not know why it should. We might have it all, if we did but feel the value and helpfulness of common praise. And we have helps now, beyond our fathers. I do not speak of the sacred organ, which is not everywhere yet; and which no wise rulers will ever thrust upon any congregation, till the congregation, with something like unanimity, desire it. But surely those hymns, the outcome of the best moods of the best Christian souls,—livelier in their music than heretofore,—have done much to brighten our worship. I cease not to thank God for the success He has given to that little volume.* That earnest little band of ministers and elders, who, in the face of abundant opposition and misrepresentation, prepared our hymnal,—and never got any thanks for their work, and never paraded their names on one copy of it,—what cause they have to bless God, thinking of the good their hymns have done! Not merely in the flood of joyful sound in the great congregations: but the little book treasured under the pillow of the dying; taken from under the pillow of the blessed dead: one of those hymns the last thing ever heard in this world by a great man of another communion—who in health and strength had written keenly against the organ, and stood in suspicion of what some people call *human hymns*,—but the last sound in his dying ear was its solemn tones, accompanying a beautiful but uninspired sacred song.

* *The Scottish Hymnal.*

I do not mind at all saying that I am an enthusiast about church music. I believe in the power of praise. We never have got out of it the help we ought. I never was but in one church in Scotland where without the organ praise was all it might be.* The fault lies entirely with our congregations. Feel the worth, the value of the thing. Go into it seriously, and earnestly, and all together. And then it will come to pass, Sunday by Sunday, when the people lift up their voices, that the hand of the Lord will come upon you and me.

* The East Church, Aberdeen.

III.

NO MORE SEA.

"And there was no more sea."—REV. XXI. 1.

FOR some days past I have felt a wish to preach to you from this text. The sea is so much with us here, it meets our eyes so continually, that such a text must sometimes suggest itself to every one of us. And every preacher knows the capricious way in which texts push themselves on one, and will not be put off. Whoever really thinks upon the text, will find it very difficult to resolve how it is to be understood: and I cannot say that at the first glance it looks like one from which to preach an eminently practical sermon. We shall see about that. But we have here thought of several negative statements in revelation as to that better world, so often named, so little realised. No night there,—no more pain,—no temple there: and it may interest, if we add to these one more. *They* tell us a great deal, each of them: they are quite easily understood; and without the least fancifulness (which is quite abhorrent in speaking of such serious and awful things), they may

be carried out into very far-reaching consequences. It is different, very different in some respects, with the unexplained, short, strong statement, that when this world is reconstructed,—when things here are so changed that there will be a new heaven and a new earth, the first heaven and the first earth having *passed by* (for *that* is the more accurate rendering),—then in that blessed, holy and happy world, "*the sea is no longer*," so, literally, the words run.

I have turned up what a great many people have written as to the meaning of the text: from simple and old-fashioned folk who just take it as it is written, to those more sophisticated in their interpretation of Scripture, who greatly allegorise it. Some readers of the verse, I have said, take it literally. I suppose at first we all should do so. They say that three-fourths of this world are at present useless for human habitation: these are a waste of waters, incapable of being dwelt upon, unless by the passing mariner. And indeed it is strange to think how little a portion of this little globe,—so little amid the vast orbs round it,—bears and contains all sin and all sorrow. Just let one-quarter more of this world be like the rest; and man would never have sinned nor suffered. Truly the sea is very big: the expanse of ocean is wide and vast beyond all our imagination. I have been told by some who have crossed the Atlantic, even by what may be called that much-beaten track between Europe and America, that the thing which

most impressed them was its utter loneliness and its inexpressible vastness: hardly a sail to be seen on the enormous weltering surface from land to land: as King David called it, though he knew little indeed of its awful spreadings, "this great and wide sea." Still more solemnly does this impress those who have traversed the lone Pacific: who have sailed on towards the West, week after week, the sun going down every evening straight before the bowsprit end: and no limit, no mark, no ship, nothing to break the illimitable, unbeginning, unending sea. We are not to think of our little bay, nor even of the narrow waters between us and Norway,—narrow only in comparison with that crushing infinitude,—when we think of the unspeakable and unimaginable exertion of the omnipotence of God Almighty, implied in the declaration that all that sea must go. Well, say many good men; when this world is prepared either for the final abode or for the occasional visits of blest souls, —when this world is turned to Heaven, or even becomes an outlying little bit of Heaven,—more room will be needed for the vast population, the multitude which no man can number; and so those wastes of water cannot be spared: they must be turned into green sunshiny tracts, vast continents of sweet fields and flowery plains, fitted for the homes of blest people who shall never sin nor sorrow any more. Then, there are others who, though believing or hoping that the renewed earth will be at least a province or por-

tion of the final Paradise,—and indeed there have been summer days on which this earth looked so beautiful, that one has thought, were but sin and sorrow vanished, this earth would do,—yet hold that we need not understand St John to say expressly that the sea is to disappear wholly, but only that in the new earth there will be no such uninhabited wastes as those meanwhile caused by the spreadings of the ocean: but that those vast regions will be made available for man's habitation as now they cannot be. There may be a sea; this same book of Revelation makes mention of "a sea of glass mingled with fire;" and on many a calm summer evening, on many a crimson November afternoon, you have seen along these shores what makes us understand the imagery; —there may be all this, say these good explainers of Scripture,—but not any more the desolate wastes of ocean, bleak, stormy, awful, where no man can dwell.

We should accept humbly whatever God might tell us as to His future purposes with our earth. His way in all things must be the right way. But, it may yet be said that to many of us, whose earliest remembrances are of that sound, and of that level expanse, and of those shelly sands, it would be hard to make it seem a change for the better, that there should be no more sea. We have it here always with us. Most of us would say that the great charm would be gone from the situation of this city, if *it* were away. There are sad associations indeed

with the sea, in many minds. Many anxious hearts must needs be under the fisherman's roof, and the sailor's, when the storm comes: and it is a perilous life they lead, and a hard life, at most times: the life of those who earn their bread and their children's bread at sea. Often one must think how the harvest of the sea is gathered in with "lives of men." And you know how much our commerce costs, in that sorrowful price. You open the newspaper anxiously after a storm: you read the story of wrecks, each carrying desolation to some little home. Even landsmen know a little of what is meant by a storm at sea; we know how under the hurricane those irresistible waves have quenched many a precious life; we read the awful records of starvation upon the raft or in the boat, till we wonder how a merciful God could bear to look down on it day after day. Yet who does not know the good we owe to the sea? Every shower that freshens the green fields and trees far inland, came from that great treasure-house of the rain. I suppose all those wastes of ocean are needed. A desolate unbelieving philosopher who died a little ago, used to get angry when it was suggested that things in this world must in the main be ordered right (at least where man's folly and wickedness do not put them wrong): used to maintain that we have not the smallest assurance that things in this world are not grossly mismanaged. He did not believe that this world is *managed* at all: that is,

by an ordering mind and will. We need not take it upon us to say, as some have said, that this is the best of all possible worlds. We know nothing about that; and we are not called to give any opinion on the matter. But we believe that this world was made and is governed by a wise and good God. And we have confidence in Him. We are sure there is reason for everything He does: though oftentimes we cannot see it. No doubt at all, the sea, just as it is, is the right thing now. Even we can see some of the good it does. It is from it the rains come, that revive all the land: without which no vegetable life could abide or grow. Recent experience has helped us to know the thankfulness of King David, when he said, in that memorable psalm, "Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby Thou didst confirm Thine inheritance when it was weary." How beautiful those gracious showers, that refresh drooping crops, dusty hedges, parched-up grass, making all nature green and fragrant and hopeful! And all due to the great, bountiful sea; under Him from whom is every good gift. Then, you know how those bracing waters nerve and restore: how those balmy summer sea-breezes have recruited failing strength,—have fanned the pale cheek of sickness into health's rosy glow. If in one sense the sea divides mankind, in another it unites mankind. It is the cheap highway of nations. It is a road, ready for the passage of every one who will provide a suit-

able conveyance. In this, it is wholly unlike the land. On land, the road must be made as well as the conveyance. Get your railway train, get your magnificent locomotive engine: they are of no use till at vast cost of money and time you have made your railway. But build your ship, and launch her; and she is free to go anywhere on her proper element. Her road, her highway, is ready made, made by God's own hand. And setting utility aside, think how grand a sight the sea is, in summer calm, in winter tempest: deep purple in the sunset against red sky, against blue hills: glittering beyond all words, as the golden summer sun rises out of it: a wild ridgy plain, with the white crests: sometimes, when you are miles inland, wonderfully crowning with dark blue the yellow harvest fields: where in all this universe is its Maker's skill more seen? And then, that Voice; the surgy murmur, the thunderous roar! "Two Voices are there," says a chiefest poet: "One is of the sea; one of the mountains: each a mighty voice:" so mighty, indeed, that it seems no unworthy thing, listening to mighty wave or mighty wind, that men have fancied that in either they heard the voice of its great Creator! So mighty, that the inspired Psalmist, seeking a comparison not unworthy, found it here: "The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice: the floods lift up their waves. The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters: yea, than

the mighty waves of the sea." Dear to many of us, too, through old remembrances, of our own early days, and of those who are gone, is that glorious work of its Almighty Maker. Is there anything that most of us remember longer? We, indeed, in Scotland, are everywhere so comparatively near it, that we fail to take in how many of the inhabitants of Britain have never seen the sea; it is to numbers a name, a msytery. Now, is it all to go? And will it be an improvement when it is gone? Will not *that* rather strip the world of a supreme beauty? Will not *that* take away a factor in the machinery of material creation without which that machinery could not (without perpetual miracle) go on at all? Is it not a hard thing and a sad thing, that there must be "no more sea?"

Now I will say frankly that such reflections dispose me to look with favour on a suggestion which I have seen made by a cautious and judicious thinker, which would put quite another meaning on my text. St John, it is suggested, wrote this book of Revelation in the little Isle of Patmos, where he was held a prisoner—an unwilling prisoner. He was eager to get elsewhere to work for Christ, to preach the Gospel of salvation. It was the surrounding sea that shut him up as in a prison: no walls nor fetters could have chafed him more with their cruel restraint than did that blue smiling sea. It was his jailer: it was his iron chains: it shut in his cage, his cell: he loathed it for what it did, with all its beauty. And

so, thinking of the better earth, describing it, trying to show how delightful it would be,—he declared that the thing would be absent there which most irked him here: There should be "no more sea!" Then is the true, the deeper meaning of my text, that in the renovated world, each shall be delivered from his own special cross, and burden, and worry, and anxiety, and temptation, that was here most keenly felt? Does it mean that, there, that thing will be away, concerning which we feel that we should be right, it would be well with us, were but *that* away? The thorn in the flesh: the uneasy mental organisation: the proclivity to care, anxiety, unthankfulness: the tendency (which the man cannot help) to see the worst side of people, as well as to dread the worst event: the special besetting sin, that held back, and humbled, and shamed: the slow, wearing, never-absent worry that here killed peace: the black stain on the past, on yourself or those before you but for whom you would not have been: each suffering mortal knows where the shoe pinches: does the Apostle mean to tell us, in the language of exalted poetry, how *that* shall be gone?

I think this is it. Perhaps, just at first, all this may seem a very non-natural meaning to put on the text. There is nothing I should more shrink from than in any way to wrest holy Scripture. But it is not wresting language, when you understand figurative language figuratively. Look at the whole chapter in

which the text stands: it is a strain of the most elevated poetry: it refuses to be construed literally, and tied to prosaic details. You know the supremely figurative style of all this Book of Revelation. All through, the Apostle is like a painter trying to dash upon his canvas things which his colours cannot show: the Apostle is striving to tell in words what words cannot tell: he is aiming at a meaning which no means to be reached here can carry to man's understanding or heart. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." And specially, there are things in this chapter which *cannot* be understood literally. We are told, to name just one thing, of a city descending out of heaven from God: a city three hundred and seventy-five miles long, broad and *high:* a city whose dimensions are physically impossible, if you will tie them to literal prose. But who, with a soul to receive that adumbration of the Golden City, would point out that though length and breadth are conceivable, a city three hundred and seventy-five miles *high* could not be? Who does not discern that the mention of length and breadth and height being equal, conveys the idea of squareness, of completeness, of nothing being lacking or amiss: of God having gathered in all His people,—"made up His jewels:" brought all things in the end Right and Perfect as He would have them be!

And so too with the text. The Apostle knew what cumbered and hindered him, eager to work for Christ: and saying *his* great trouble would be gone, conveyed in figure that it should be so likewise, in the renovated earth, with each blessed soul.

My dear friends, what does that say to each of you? Each who feels his sinfulness,—and who but the chief of fools must feel that hourly? each who trusts his soul in penitence and faith to the Blessed Redeemer, —and God grant that each of us and all of us do *that* daily, coming ever to the Cross anew;—each has part here. And each mortal, from the poor idiot whose life was made bitter by the cruel schoolboys, up to the great philosophic theologian whose soul craves unceasingly for the discovery of the great secret, for the knowledge of the meaning of this life,—has his own especial burden from which he longs to be free. Besides that first great burden, from which are all others,—that weary SIN, whence comes death and all our woe,—from which we must be delivered by Christ's blood and by the grace of the blessed Spirit; —which must be equally taken off from all,—though indeed it has pressed in very different degrees, and with most diverse types of pang; yet all constrained to join alike in the common petition, "Oh wash me in Thy precious blood, and take my sins away:"— besides that primary all-crushing load that weighs on every mortal; it would be very interesting, and very touching, to know how the assurance that in the bet-

ter world *that* will be specially gone which here specially cumbered and pierced and stung and held back, affects each : to know what the thing is that each is thankfully thinking, Well, bless God, I shall be free from *that* for evermore. I propose no Confessional : but possibly if the secrets of hearts were revealed, it would appear that very humble and personal cares weigh upon most : and that for one whose great desire is (say) the conversion of the Jews, there are about a million who are thinking anxiously of their boys and girls, and of how those little ones will be cared for when they are far away. They will begin low down, the burdens from which human hearts will hail the hope to be delivered. There are poor creatures, God help them, who, thinking of the assurance in my text, would say, Well, I shall never know cold or hunger any more : I shall be quit of ever-gnawing pain ; I shall have leave to breathe, I shall be able to lie still. Think not, brethren, that I am speaking of what I have not known and seen,—ay, within these last few days : looking on patient sufferers, upon one quiet young sufferer I shall never forget,—for whom there could not be the hope, through many anguished days and nights, of rest on any bed in this world, but the last and lowest. And, leaving the actual personal load that weighs down the very individual being, there still remain homely burdens from which our kindly partners in humanity will thank God in the prospect of being free. Well, says one, I shall never see my

children hungry; never see them growing thin and white : I shall have no more anxiety for them or me : I shall have no fear about failing health, about waning life, with so much depending on one that one sometimes trembles. And another would say, Well, I shall be delivered finally from that bad tendency which I have fought against all these years and never made a bit of way; just as unsanctified in temper and conversation as when I first fancied I had believed in Christ; never to be emancipated from that thorn in the spirit on this side of time; stumbling and falling to the last. And to some other, there will be nothing pleasanter to think of than that, in the renewed world, everything morbid, in imagination, in feeling, will have passed by. I am more foolish and weaker, such a one would say, than any one knows but myself: but *there* I shall no longer be at the mercy, for my mood, of things and people round me, —of clever malignants, and even of blundering fools: the springs of peace and joy, within, will never fail; will never be fouled by bad men. And then, to some, what greater relief from a dreary incubus than in the assurance, that there will be a stop, a final stop, put to all the lies, the malice, the abuse, sickening to every generous mind, of what is called Religious Controversy? The Devil must be entirely pleased to see the way in which many professed Christians carry on their disputes. He could not wish it any worse than it very often is : so dishonest, so malignant, so

mean and ignoble. I am thinking, I frankly tell you, of the controversies of our own day. But it is very strange to look at scurrilous lampoons written by the hand that wrote *Rock of Ages*: still stranger to turn over certain of the controversial treatises of Milton, and to think that this foul-mouthed, uncandid, malicious slanderer was the half-inspired immortal that wrote *Paradise Lost*. From that awful spot and wrinkle the glorified Church will be free. From envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness, Good Lord, deliver us!

Just a closing word. No one can forget the famous imagery of a "sea of troubles." A lesser number of readers will remember how one of the sweetest of our poets,* cast upon the waste of ocean, felt something whisper in his hearing how this typed the sea of life. Surely, dear friends, each of us to-day will join in the prayer to our Blessed Redeemer, that all, abiding steadfast in the faith, may be enabled so to pass through the waves and storms of this uncertain world, that finally we may come to the haven of everlasting rest: where, in God's way (which is the right way), and in some sense which there and then will perfectly content us, there shall be "no more sea!"

* Campbell: *A Dream.*

IV.

SERVANT AND FRIEND.

"But Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried beneath Bethel under an oak: and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth."—GEN. xxxv. 8.

DO you wonder, any of you, why I have taken this verse for my text? Does it seem to you as if there were not much in it? Come and listen, while I recall to you that old scene.

There is a gathering to lay an aged woman in the dust. It is hard by that bleak hillside, the sacred Bethel, which to all Scotch children whose parents cared at all for their training, and to all worshippers in Scotch churches, is a household word. She was laid under a terebinth tree: in the text it is called an oak, and the name is no doubt near enough. It must have been a marked and great tree then; for the verse ought to have been translated, "beneath Bethel under *the* oak;" but now beyond *The oak of Bethel*, it received a special name, linking it not to a mere locality how sacred soever, but to human feeling, to the experience of human hearts, a yet sacreder thing. It is

gone, of course, long ago; but while it stood there were those who called it Allon-bachuth. That word conveys no meaning to us. You will see more in it when you are told what it means. *The oak of weeping* our marginal Bibles say: those more minutely-accurate have translated the word *The terebinth of tears.*

Now the inspired history does not say a word, save in this indirect way, of any special grief at that death —that breaking of a link to the long-past history of some there. For anything the Book of Genesis expressly records, this may have been one of those saddest of all deaths about which nobody particularly cares. But the name given to the old oak tree speaks of mourning: of very thoughtful and sorrowful if not of very bitter tears: of kindly remembrances of old days and faithful duty: of the utter blotting out, fit at such a season, of every recollection but such as are kindly, sad, and hopeful.

Then, wherefore this name of sorrow? Who is it that is so honoured in her burial; her name recorded where all generations will read it, in no history less dignified than God's own Word; and the sorrow for her never forgotten, because recorded there? She was no more than an old servant: one who had served the family so long and faithfully that she had grown one of it; prized in her active life, cared for in her failing age; wept over at the last with this memorable weeping.

There is not much directly told of her, but what is

told is infinitely suggestive. Many a year before, when Rebekah came away, at a sudden call, but a call from God, from her home and kindred, with Abraham's faithful steward, to be the wife of Isaac; there was but one companion came with her, one known face, amid that company of strangers to whom she trusted herself so implicitly. For "they sent away Rebekah their sister, and her nurse, and Abraham's servant, and his men." So long ago, a hundred and twenty-five years, unnamed then, she had come with the young Rebekah whose youth she had watched over. She had seen Rebekah grow grey, grow old, and die. A new generation had sprung up; Abraham was gone. Jacob, the son of her old mistress, was himself getting far on in the pilgrimage; he had many children, and great wealth. Through all years and changes the nameless nurse had been so helpful, so faithful: you picture the life of quiet even busy kindly usefulness. She had lived for others; she had no home nor ties of her own apart from the household where she was so serviceable; she is named only when she was dead. The good Deborah must have well deserved that grief, that honour. How faithful, how indispensable, how patient, how good and kind, the famous terebinth of Bethel may declare. She must have "done what she could!" Few there are, few among human beings, who have left so good a memorial of a kindly life behind them, as the old faithful servant who was laid under that oak of tears.

All the realities, the uttermost commonplaces, of human life and history, and the passing on of time, are infinitely touching when brought really home to us. The wearied-out old frame laid in the last sleep; the hopeful young days a hundred and twenty-five years ago; the busy, helpful life of work and worry: you see them all.

Surely there is something to be thought of, in these present days, in this glimpse of the relation between a patriarchal household and its faithful servant and friend: something of practical suggestion to both masters and servants, both mistresses and maids.

It could not have been, this warm and near relation, you see for one thing, but that the relation had lasted long. A new servant in a family, however faithful and good, can never be like one who is surrounded with the associations of many years; who is bound up with the remembrance of sorrowful and glad events in the family history; who is an embodiment of the *Auld Lang Syne.* It takes time to find out and know the good points and the failings; it takes more time to establish the tie of association, and affection, and respect. It is a bad account of a congregation if a new minister, however able and diligent, quite effaces the remembrance of the old one; whose voice was familiar in the public worship of each Sunday, who was linked with the births and deaths, the weddings

and christenings of a generation, the domestic joys and sorrows of the flock over which he was set. And so it takes time to make the relation between servant and master the ideal and normal relation, the thought of which is so pleasant. Now no one can fail to see how often that powerful binder-together is lacking now. I find it so in my visiting of the parish; the cottages of the ploughmen, in many cases, with new tenants each year; the young women who serve in-doors, and in whom one is interested when they become communicants, a clergyman hardly knows them till they are gone. How much better the way of the old time; the way of long connection, year after year; the servant no mere hireling but a trusted friend; the master or mistress no mere payer of the scanty wages, no mere taskmaster and fault-finder; but coming in a parent's place, caring for soul and body, for character and prospects, for the spiritual and temporal well-being of the servant: feeling a true responsibility for each one that dwells under the roof.

I know well that all this may still be found; and it blesses both parties concerned. But it must be plain to everybody who can see, that the ancient fashion of long-lasting relation between servant and master or mistress—the days in which they grew grey together—these things are exceptional now. Now, why this change for the worse? Neither servant nor master is bettered by rapid and perpetual change of place. Surely there is an impatience on either part: a lack

of wise and right bearing with human nature and its inevitable imperfection,—allowing for that, and making up one's mind to it. Surely we tend to an ignorant hope of finding in change a perfection in the working of the domestic machinery which it is the condition of our life we shall never find: even of finding elsewhere than where and how we are an even quietude, a rest in short, which we shall never find at all, unless in a godly self-denying life, and in faithful duty; which is another way of saying in God, in Christ's salvation, in the blessed Spirit's indwelling in our hearts. It is not because you who are servants have unreasonable masters: not because you who are masters have careless or low-principled servants: that your life is not evenly joyous, as you thought when children it would be. There is something far deeper than that. Now, when will masters and mistresses learn that it is not wise to look for perfection for fifteen or twenty pounds a year? When will they take it in that, being far short of perfection themselves, they cannot reasonably expect it in others who inherited the same imperfect nature, and have had much fewer advantages in the respect of education? Then, is there not, in some, a lack of, call it sympathy, call it imagination, to realise the actual disadvantages of a servant's life,—the dark morning risings, the constant doing of work which is constantly undone, and leaves no trace, and which concerns what belongs to another; sometimes the gloomy chambers

in which such a one must work and sleep? Is there not, in some, a lack of sense to feel that servants, like all human beings, have their need for amusement; have their friends, their society? Is there not, in some, a lack of discernment to take in the plain fact, that it is just as possible for a mistress to be impertinent to a maid, as a maid to a mistress: that the rules of decent courtesy and civility are just as binding on one as on the other—more binding, if there be a difference, where the better training has been? Is there anywhere, I wonder, now, the idiotic and unjust rule that a servant must never answer again; which means that, however wrongly accused, a human being is not to be suffered to vindicate himself or herself, but must go through the day with the pent-up sense of having been unfairly used, that specially bitter feeling? Be sure that if the relation between two rational creatures is to last long, it must be founded on the first principles of common justice and common sense.

And servants, too, often forget how considerable are the advantages of their position in a well-governed Christian household. They really have all the substantial comforts of life just as much as their master and mistress. In these respects they are incomparably better than where they came from; and where they will go if they come to have houses of their own. They should value their places, in a household where they are always civilly spoken to,

and not overworked: and light, indeed, are the work and care of a domestic servant, when compared with those of a labouring man's wife: value their places even if an over-tasked mistress or master sometimes, under worries of which they know nothing, should be a little unreasonable and hasty of speech. No one can look into certain periodicals, now-a-days, without finding letters written by mistresses, giving dreadful accounts of their maids; their helplessness, extravagance, and unreasonableness. I doubt not there is some truth in these. But it is not the whole truth. There are innumerable servants who are helpful, obliging, reasonable, well-principled. Let us remember that on both sides of the relation there is a great deal of human nature. There is equal imperfection on either side: all the faults are not on one. Both sides must put up with a little. Where a servant is faithful, honest, and reasonably efficient, let not the master be in haste to seek another. Where the house is healthy, and the family kind and reasonable, let not the servant be in haste to change her place. Let the tie grow, the pleasant home-tie. It is very good that human beings should daily do each other kindnesses that are not and cannot be paid for. You do not pay for the cheerful smile and the ready willingness to oblige; money cannot buy them. They come because you deserve them, through the kindness, tolerance, and reasonableness of months and years.

Now a word to masters and mistresses of Christian homes.

We ought not, with those who serve and live under our roof, to have a mere money relation. We owe our servants a great deal more than their wages. Constant courtesy has been named. Let me add, sympathy in their troubles and perplexities. Encourage them to come to you with such. Very little things, which you could easily clear up, sometimes lie heavy on a poor human heart. Then, see that they have healthy rooms, with due air and light. It is nothing short of shocking to see the accommodation provided in some houses for the servants. Further, let there be some sunshine in their lives. No human being ought to be disheartened. No human being should be condemned (if we can help it) to a cheerless, bare, savourless life. Let every mistress try to realise that the servants are her fellow-creatures; and, in the best things about her, very like herself. All the little weaknesses and vanities in them are just as apparent (to her friends) in her. It is just as natural and right that the servants should have a little amusement, a little society, as that the master and mistress should. You gather your family about you at Christmas-time. Remember, then, that those who serve you are away from *their* father and mother: all their relations perhaps far away. And the holidays they can have are of necessity brief. Try to make your servants happy in serving you: pleased with

themselves. A little thing will go far: a kind word. Let there ever be ready and hearty praise when they do well; and not (as with some masters) only ready fault-finding when they do wrong. In a word, make your servants feel you are their friend. It can be done, and yet each party keep his proper place.

Next a word to servants.

Look at my text, and think how honourable is your calling, if you abide in it with God; that is, do your duty. There are folk who talk about the *lower orders;* who use terms of depreciation in speaking of people of less worldly means; forgetting that many a person is much *better off* than most of his neighbours who is not by a pennyworth *better* than the poorest of them. These transitory and non-essential distinctions of worldly place do not exist at all in God's estimate of us; and people of sense and right feeling never use such phrases. It is always and everywhere a humbling thing to be a sinful human being; and the self-conceited one, who does not feel that, is the blindest and poorest creature of all. You are as respectable as any mortal: I do not hesitate to add, when you are worthy of it, as much respected. Honour does not come of our outward condition; *that* is God's business. He put us each where we are. Honour comes of the faithfulness, diligence, and efficiency with which we do our duty in our condition, no matter what that be. A Christian servant, faithful, kindly, self-denying, has a sphere in which the

best graces of God's Holy Spirit are daily needed, and may daily grow. Can human being desire better than to be set where one may earn from the blessed Redeemer the never-forgotten words of supreme approval, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." With *that* before us, servants and soldiers of the Master above, we shall not be much discouraged though our faculties be modest and our estate lowly, nor though here and there one be found, one who is willing to look down upon those to whom God has appointed that these things be so. Useful and helpful, how much better than useless and helpless; as is the life of too many in worldly ranks above yours. Every day doing many offices for which some fellow-creatures are the better; lightening inconceivably the burden of daily life, and smoothing its friction, for the furtherance of the work of others, who may be serving their race as you cannot directly do; making pain easier to bear, and worry less distracting, and irritations as little as may be; helpful and felt to be helpful at every turn; more and more trusted and leant on year after year: is *that* little for mortal man or woman to have been? We will not forget the honour God's Word has done to just such an unobtrusive but useful life. Men who were great in their generation on earth, have been clean forgotten; there have been brave and renowned,

whose memorial is perished. But the old servant's name is here, and will abide till the end of time: with the record of how they missed her, how they mourned her, the shadow of a faithful and useful life, wherein the entrusted talent was well applied. God grant that each of us, in our place, do as well! Student and professor, servant and master, trader and land-owner, learned and unlearned—let Him grant that dwelleth above that we fare no worse, when we come to be tried, than she!

When I go to preach elsewhere, in churches where I am a stranger, it is becoming that I set out something more of general Christian doctrine than I have done to-day. Here, where I am at home, a minister of nearly ten years among you, it is fit and right that from time to time I address to you just such homely lessons of practical Christianity as I have now sought to do. Many things have lately told us how swiftly the day of life and duty may be cut short; how soon our Master and Saviour may come for us. But by His grace, seeking for His blessed Spirit, we shall each of us "occupy till He come."

V.

THE GLORY DEPARTED.

"The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken."—1 SAM. iv. 22.

WE do not know her name, nor her years, nor her previous career, the poor broken-hearted woman that died with these words on her lips. Four verses tell us all we are told of her: but they are four verses in the Bible; and so the best of mankind, by millions, have read her little history; and many of the kindest hearts that ever beat in this world have felt for her. She comes, for just this little time, out of the darkness and the void: she is before us, stunned, despairing, and dying: no doubt her short life had had its blinks of sunshine, but she abides in our memory an image of the deepest tragedy: and after these few minutes of supreme anguish, she goes back to the silence whence she came. Who does not feel for her, the best of a bad race: the poor suffering creature of whom the little we know is all good, though not perhaps strong-minded or heroic? There is always something that comes very straight to the sympathy of some

folk, in the picture of one fairly beaten: one who has quite given up, broken-hearted. There are those who have felt so for a while: but have gathered themselves up, have got out of it, and over it: and to whom a good time came after all. But it was not with her the passing despondency through which human beings get again into the cheerful sunshine. With her it was the last of this life; and, thus giving up, she died.

It was an awful blow that struck down that poor wife of the undeserving Phinehas, and that came in her own hour of extremity. Her husband was dead, and her aged father-in-law; her nation was crushed; Israel had fled before the Philistines, and there had been a great slaughter: but far beyond these things in every faithful heart was the unutterable loss of the sacred ark of God. What cared she for her child in that overwhelming hour? They told her that she had borne a son—it seems likely her first-born—and you can think of no stronger proof how for her the whole interest of life was crushed out than you have in the simple statement of her entire indifference: "She answered not, neither did she regard it." But before she passed, she gave her boy the proverbial name—the name which has gone into human speech—and which all men use to express a most sorrowful event. Not the genius of Shakespeare could exceed the prevalence that abides in the word wrung from the heart of the nameless Hebrew woman. And putting aside her own bitter individual losses, she summed up what

had killed her in the one woful wail, "The glory is departed from Israel; for the ark of God is taken!"

We talk of public spirit: which means caring for what concerns the whole community about us with something of that real interest with which most people care for themselves. We have heard of that statesman who broke down, and died of a broken heart, not for any misfortune that had befallen himself, but for grief at defeat and disgrace that had befallen his nation; and whose last words were, "How I leave my country!" I heard myself the greatest man among the clergy of the National Church pleading, for nearly the last time, for a great cause committed to him, in which he held (and held rightly) that the glory of our Saviour was bound up. I never can forget the pathos of the closing words that said how he had staked his life on it,—that said how, if the time came by which his work must be completed, and it was not completed, then "some of us will be glad to find a grave." And the thing that brings such manifestations of human feeling so home to us is just that they reproduce so startlingly the mood of that Hebrew mother who cared for nothing more in this world if God's presence, and the symbol of God's presence, were lost to her land and her race. When God was gone from Israel, why should she care to stay! Everything had broken down: all the world had come to end and ruin: when God had given up His people, and was departed away.

But yet remember that thus commending the piety and the patriotism of that nameless woman, I do not say that you have in her the highest manifestation of these. It is well to die for one's country: better to die for Christ and His cause: but better than either is to live and work for these: to retrieve the lost cause, to turn the tide of battle, to bring back the ark that has been taken, to change a defeat into a triumph. But it is not in the last exhaustion of ebbing life that such a thing can be. And like enough, in her most healthful days, not much of the spirit of the intrepid Deborah the prophetess was in that more womanly nature of which we have now seen the last. Pitt was dying, too, when he bade them *roll up the map of Europe;* and when our great preacher spoke of finding a grave if the India Mission broke down, it was within the last few months of his work and life, when it was not as it used to be with the strong and hopeful Norman Macleod. There have been those who, in circumstances as desperate as those of Israel on that black day, would not have despaired—would have risen to the need of the occasion, and gone, with heart and soul, to the work of setting things right again. Such was Luther—such was Knox. But there are few indeed to whom God is pleased to give that strength and that courage. And it is quite vain for one who has them not to think to act as though he had them. Dismal will that man's breakdown be.

We pass away, now, from any further reflection on the fashion in which this one or that might receive the stroke of overwhelming misfortune, to think of the great and much-forgotten truth conveyed in the words of the wife of Phinehas—the truth, that the glory of a nation depends on God's presence with it; that is, on its religious character; on its reverence for God's ordinances, and its zeal for His worship and service; on its devoutness and earnestness and reverence of spirit; on its freedom from frivolity; on its careful observance of honesty and truthfulness in all its dealings between man and man; in brief, on its solemn holding by what is *Right*, and abhorring what is *Wrong*. A nation may seem to prosper for a while when this is not so; but its prosperity is rotten at the heart. It may have a gay and beautiful capital, an exhilarating climate, and the gift of the most refined taste in little things; but sure as the fear of God has died out in it, and men have come to slight the old homely lesson to cease to do evil and learn to do well, the glory has departed from it, and the day will come when *that* shall be made plain to all.

The glory was gone from Israel when the religious sanction was gone, the symbol of God's presence. I think it is possible to make the analogous truth about every nation so plain upon even quite material grounds, that all will understand it. But surely no professed Christian, who believes that eternity is of more account than time, and that spiritual health

and wealth are worth more than material, will need any evidence beyond the first glance at the statement, to assure him that it is true. We have before us the two great classes of interests, and the old comparison; the "treasures on earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal," and the "treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." And wheresoever the treasure above is lost or neglected, no true prosperity or honour can be. Where a nation is not Christian in spirit, not made up of God-fearing men and women, believing in Christ, and trying daily by the grace of the Holy Spirit to put down sin in their hearts and lives, and to be holy, there is no glory about that nation to any one that sees things right. Where there is no life above the mere material life; no faith in anything beyond what is discerned by the five senses; where a nation is secularised out and out, set wholly on this world and its passing possessions; there is nothing glorious or noble about it in the judgment of any created intelligence whose judgment is worth a straw. But where a nation acts avowedly on Christian principles; where the miserable shifts of expediency are cast aside, and the awful and eternal difference between right and wrong is perpetually remembered and acted on; where in all dealings, public and private, diplomatic and commercial, the nation acknowledges God by

resolutely doing right; there is its true glory, in the righteousness that exalteth a nation — exalteth it according to the standard that is recognised above. I do not suppose anything worse than worldliness as implied in the departure of the ark; but the history of mankind has revealed lower depths —the utter extinction of common honesty in dealings, —a race of liars and cheats,—the total destruction of purity and virtue in life,—a race where the fireside sanctities of domestic life were contemned or unknown,—scenes than which hell itself could be little worse,—the fearful demoralisation and disintegration of society which have preceded and attended the destruction of some of the world's great empires, East and West. When Sodom had become morally what Sodom was, it was a fouler and more degraded sight, amid all its gaiety and prosperity, amid the beautiful scenery of that vale of Siddim, fair as the Garden of the Lord,—a fouler and worse sight than after the fires of avenging wrath descended, and the vile place was hidden under the waters of the Dead Sea.

And so with nations in days nearer our own. Where the blight of immorality spreads from the throne downwards over the land; when the priest at the altar turns atheist; when a despicable wretch, preaching before the king, says that *all men must die*, and then, seeing the king did not like it, hastened to back out of the statement by changing it to *almost*

all; when the Christian Church (so called) became little better than a machinery for crushing down and keeping down the toiling millions, and for baptizing the oppression, cruelty, rapacity, and pollution of the rich; when the poor peasant, ground to the earth, looking up for help or deliverance, saw none either from God or man; I say, in those days France was a blacker and wofuller sight than in the direst horrors of the Revolution which these things made sure to come. There were those then who thought it a glorious age. There were military triumphs after a sort, and painters to show them on acres of canvas. There was a literature suited to the period; and poets, with the souls of serfs or valets, were ready to sing of an Augustan age, and of the splendour of the smile—brighter than the sunshine—of the contemptible fool they called monarch. There was a gorgeous and extravagant architecture, hateful now to all who know where the money came from to pay for it. But it was a degraded and miserable time with all, and not a glorious one. The glory was departed from the land, for the ark of God had left it! Foul wickedness blots out all save shame!

We may well thank God—humbly, not pharisaically—that it never was so bad with our own country. Moral and spiritual life were never worn out here as they have been elsewhere; yet here, too, there have been long times of great religious deadness. And

with that religious deadness there came a paralysis and ignobleness over all human activity: even taste was depraved when hearty piety was all but extinct. In matters æsthetic, as well as in graver matters, one part of our work now is to efface the signs of the dreary eighteenth century. Whenever you find a church at once extravagantly costly and inexpressibly hideous, be sure it dates from that dead time. When, but in such a season, could this once noble church* have been distorted from its old glory into its present violation of every canon of art? But, passing from the thought of the shortcomings of our ancestors, let us think of the specially besetting sins of our time, and pray that God's grace may not suffer them so to prevail against us as that they may provoke Him to remove our candlestick out of its place. For there are sad things, and of evil omen, that must weigh heavily on every patriotic heart, among the signs of these times. There is the awful curse—the national disgrace—of drunkenness, with all the misery and crime that come of it. There is a depravation of morality in some classes, both high and low. It is a miserable thing to overhear the language in which too many talk together. There is a cynicism in our literature that would sneer down all that is elevating and noble; sometimes a glorifying of intellect without God, and then a glorifying of animal strength and

* The parish church of St. Andrews.

agility without God—doubtless a considerably lower depth. And even in things which are right, many do in these days find or make temptation. The wheels of life are hurried now. To multitudes there are few blinks of leisure—little opportunity to "study to be quiet." Many of the recent discoveries of science tend directly to more feverish haste, and a greater eagerness in business; a condition of soul in which men are very apt to be "bustled out of their spirituality," as a good man called it. Our material triumphs are not without their spiritual perils and drawbacks. Doubtless somewhat of the energy with which secular work is prosecuted has come into the prosecution of religious work too. I suppose, speaking generally, there never was a period in which the clergy worked so hard, or tended to break down so early. You could not easily imagine anything less likely to have happened in the last century than that an Archbishop of Canterbury should be struck down, over-driven, at an age much short of sixty. And if this be an age of building vast railway stations, noble law courts, huge and costly secular institutes, it is likewise an age in which churches are built and beautified, if not like those of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, at least far other than the squalid and disgraceful barns which men, themselves dwelling in costly if tasteless creations, once thought good enough to set aside for the house of God. It is a sign of something better than improved taste when

Christians no longer seek to bring offerings to God of that which costs them nothing, or as near nothing as may be: when Christians bring their best in art and architecture, as well as in devotion and exertion; when the almost ostentatious irreverence which used to be the scandal of our public worship has been supplanted, in many places, by a solemnity and order which draw us nearer to the best of those who have borne the Christian name.

If there were any anywhere (I am sure there are none here) who might be disposed to say that there is something fanciful and sentimental, and away from the work-day realities of life, in the kinds of national loss and degradation which have been named as following a nation's loss of the religious spirit; I venture to say that it is easy to show, on the lowest grounds of mere material profit and expediency, how ruinous is that loss. There may be, somewhere, the degraded wretch who has grown rich by base dishonesty, and who does not care for the loathing of all good men if you will just let him keep his wealth; and who, as for God's disapproval, esteems *that* as neither here nor there. But a nation cannot afford to do that. The disregard of right and wrong will bring the most unmistakable material loss upon it. Every one can take in this fact: that a dishonest nation that swindles its creditors and repudiates its debts, need not think to send its agents into the money-markets of the world when it wants to raise money. Those whom it has

cheated once will not give it the chance of cheating them any more. Then, again, dishonesty in manufactures will speedily get a notoriety of character which will drive buyers elsewhere. When you pay the price of a good thing, and get a bad thing, you do not return to that mart. We know, too, how loss of discipline and courage throughout an army—how what is most fitly called *demoralisation* there—has resulted in disgraceful defeat in battle after battle, and in the very depth of national humiliation—humiliation entailing burdens that were bitterly felt by some who would not have minded about mere deprivation of old laurels. And when Education no longer means training in God's fear, but only sharpening faculties which are just as likely to be used wrongly as to be used rightly; when social vice has disintegrated society, and destroyed confidence among the units that make it; then those who might not care much for all *that*, for the mere moral foulness of it, may at least take in this serious consideration, that it is ominous of an upheaving, of a national breaking-up and tearing asunder, in which there shall not be the smallest security for property or limb or life.

Even so true and certain is the principle which the text implies. Come down, if you will, to the very grossest and most worldly standard by which you can test it. Take a nation's glory to mean what, save in the most debased estimate, it does not mean—its mere worldly wealth and credit, and still it abides most sure

that the glory goes when the fear of God goes, and all that hangs on the fear of God.

And now a closing word. The glory was departed from Israel when the ark of God was taken. *That* was the emblem, the flower, the culmination of all the national faith and consecration. The life and soul were taken out of the entire religious system of the race, when God's presence was withdrawn. And those could take it in that God's presence was withdrawn, now the outward symbol of it was lost, who could not have taken that in before. But it was not the loss of the mere material ark, sacred though it was with all the sanctity which can adhere to a material thing, that took away the presence of God, and thus turned the whole religion and worship of Israel into a ghastly skeleton. Sin had driven away God's presence before *that*. The loss of the mere wooden chest was nothing, except as a material reminder of the vital and essential loss which had gone before. When the wicked priests who perished on that fatal day had ministered to a degenerate congregation in the temple of God, wherein the ark was all safe, the whole worship was as blank and hollow a sham and unreality as after the ark was away. So with us, let us remember it solemnly, in what ought to be our holy things. It is the Spirit that quickeneth; it is the earnest reality of the worship and service of our Lord that alone avails; the outward form, except as it expresses the spirit, and is instinct with it, profits nothing at all. Cover the land with

churches, nobler tenfold than our desolate cathedral was when in its glory; multiply public services and sacraments; fling wide the doors of God's house on every day that dawns, and let a great congregation throng the sacred place in its solemn beauty; give to that worship of the time that is coming, but which we may never see, all the grandeur and the seemliness for which many wait and labour; and if, with it all, the spirit and fire of heart-devotion be lacking, the blessed gift of the Blessed Spirit, then God will be departed from His desolate house, and the glory will be gone from Britain more blankly than if war or earthquake had laid every church in the dust. But give us, in our worship, and in our life, the true in-dwelling in our hearts of the Holy Ghost, of the Divine Redeemer; and then, cheered, strengthened, lifted up, lightened, we shall be content, even amid so bare a blank of all material surroundings, as might make those who judged by mere sense to fancy that the ark of God was away!

And now to Him that dwelleth not in temples made with hands, nor only in the high and holy place, but with him that is of a humble and contrite spirit, seeking such to worship Him; be glory in the Church throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

VI.

STEP BY STEP.

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."—ST JOHN xvi. 12.

HE has said many things already to His friends and disciples in that parting discourse: many things which they would never forget, and which have been the Church's heritage of blessed consolation for many a long year. Still, He could say a great many things more, all true, all interesting, all weighty. But it was not the time nor place: and they shall not be said now.

One reason is given, a kind and thoughtful reason: meet to come from His lips Who gave it. There might be other reasons: even we can discern that very likely there were. These "many things" which our Redeemer might have said there and then, yet did not say, were doubtless things that could stand over; it would be enough that His friends should know them by and by. There was no need that the apostles should take them in nor act on them just yet. There are truths, certain and weighty, which

are not opportune. And a wise man will desire to say what is not merely true, but also seasonable. Our Saviour, you see, however, gives but the one reason for His silence: a reason of sympathy and consideration, very plain and easy to be understood: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."

I do not mean at all, now, to guess at what these things were. The only matter about them which is made plain by the inspired record is, that they were part of that "all truth" into which the apostles were to be guided by the Blessed Spirit. And all truth is a wide word. But why could not they have borne that evening to be told anything that was true and weighty? Just for the same reasons that human beings with common minds and hearts sometimes cannot bear to be told things, just then, or all at once. Because, perhaps, on that memorable evening they needed to be supported by cheering and soothing thoughts, not to be startled by what was new and strange. Their hearts were so sorrowful in the prospect of their Lord's departure, and so taken up and engrossed by *that*, that they could think of nothing else—could not fix their attention on serious things that could not be rightly apprehended unless with a fixed attention. They were not, in such a time, equal to receiving things which they would be able to receive at another time. By and by they would grow strong enough to stand what was too much for their endur-

ance now. A little boy could not sit down and learn his Latin lesson by his mother's bedside, when she was just dying. A grown man could not, there and then, collect his thoughts and write a letter on some intricate subject. The work that could be done at another time is not seasonable now; in plain words, you could not bear it. Perhaps there was more. Perhaps if the Saviour had told His disciples that evening of all His plans for the future of His Church, it would have been too much for men still holding undoubtingly all the ideas of their Jewish training. It would have been a shock to hear that sacrifices were to cease, and the temple, and the priesthood; that the Holy City was to have no preference above other places, nor the race of Abraham above the Gentile. Long afterwards they could hardly bear these things: they could not bear them now at all. They must be gradually educated up to the point of receiving such ideas, that traversed the entire tenor of their ingrained beliefs. And the Holy Spirit would do it in due time. The light would come against the day when it should be needed. There was no good in unsettling and startling them, just at present, by pressing upon them what was so contrary to the bent and training of all their life hitherto. And remembering all this, and remembering, besides, that Christ knows all; and that if He were to tell to any human being, the wisest and greatest, only a very little of all He knows, it would quite overwhelm and bewilder; we

can discern how truly He said to His apostles, and might have said to any of our race, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."

But I purpose in this discourse to turn away entirely from all special circumstances, and to think simply of the great truth which the text suggests: That it is God's way to give His people things as they can bear them. As they can bear them, to give knowledge, work, sorrow. He does not rack the child's little mind, by telling the child all at once those large truths about this world and this life which will come through the experience of years: the child could not take them in; could not understand them; and if he could understand them, could not bear them. Neither does God give the man's work, nor the man's care and trouble, to the little child: they would kill the child. Nor does God appoint to the recruit in his service what only the veteran soldier can do. As we grow seasoned to toil it is laid upon us. Nor does God show each of us, all at once, the long, weary way that we must go; or all the vast amount of labour we shall get through in all our life. We are wiled along, still keeping some measure of hope and heart, because short views are shown us. The kindly Light lets us see the one step, the next step; and we can stand that, and set ourselves to that and manage to do it. Many a hard worker, many a sufferer, looking back on what he has come through, has thought, I never could have done it,

I never could have borne it, if I had seen it all from the first: it would have crushed me! Yet with God thus showing us our work and way as we can bear them, there is none of that dishonest Economy, as it has been called, which has been practised by some men who have so kept back the truth as to suggest falsehood. God's way is to show us truth, and nothing but truth: though He does not give the whole truth at once, poured into unready ears, unequal to it: pressed upon untried hearts, which meanwhile it would break.

Let us, dwelling for a little while upon this subject, think how this is God's way: first, in providence; next, in grace.

I suppose that all of us who have reached mature years, knowing (as we know) what life will be, when we look at a company of little children, often think to ourselves, How many weary steps these little feet will have to go: How those light little hearts will know their weight of care: How the bright illusions will vanish, and life turn to the grey daylight of the latter years. The kind Father above, the sympathising Saviour who knows our frame, He looks (so to speak) upon each of us coming into the world, and says to us, You have very much to do, very much to suffer, very much to learn; but it shall not be laid on you till you grow in some measure equal to it. No doubt, my friends, there are troubles and burdens

from the first, but how little they seem to us now, as we look back! I do not forget at all that the sorrows of a child are heavy to the child: as heavy in proportion to its little strength as any that come after to the matured endurance of the man; but they are proportioned to the child's little strength,—the child can bear them, and speedily forget them, and brighten up after them; they are not like the heavy, protracted, overwhelming trials and disappointments of after life. So with the efforts which the course of Providence requires of us at the outset of our way. No doubt the alphabet is a tremendous thing to master: and still worse are the first rules of arithmetic, and then the terrible first declension. They task the little mind to the utmost, but still, children without number have learnt them. And bit by bit the great struggle and agony of education go on, the strength growing greater as the work grows heavier, till the mind is equal to the burden of higher and more exacting departments of knowledge and learning, which at first, and long after the first, would have been not difficult but impossible. And it is so with us all through life. God gives each of us a little bit of work to do; we do not look farther than the end of *that*, and we do that without breaking down. God never makes more than one day dawn upon us at once, and He bids us do what that day requires. He tells us to take no thought for the morrow,—not go and break ourselves down by bearing the burden of

two days at once, and still less of three hundred and sixty-five (as we all tend naturally to try and do): tells us that sufficient unto the day is its evil. And I do not know any arrangement in God's providence which is a more thorough carrying-out of the principle of Christ's words in the text than that arrangement which has made the life of each one of us a series of beginnings and endings. The very alternation of day and night is a comment on my text. At the close of every day God virtually says to us, I have yet many things to say to you, many things for you to do; but you cannot bear them now. Go and lie down to rest; let reviving sleep set up body and soul, and to-morrow morning you will find something new appointed for you to do, or to give heed to. Thus it is that God, in His providence, leads us on. It is one of the greatest blessings of this life, as well as one of the saddest things in this life, that there are such things as beginnings and ends.

We cannot bear a very long uniform look-out. You have all known a feeling of weariness and almost of despair arise when you looked far forward, and saw the long weary way that seemed to stretch before you in life. I believe it is not so much what we are actually enduring at the time that prompts the cry, "Now I can bear this no longer," as some vivid glimpse of all this, lasting on, and on, and on. It is wise to discipline our mind to look at life, as Christ told us to look at life, as a succession of stages, and to

think of one stage at a time, the day that is passing over us. Most people can bear one day's evil: the thing that breaks men down is the trying to bear on one day the evil of two days, twenty days, a hundred days. And this is exactly what Christ told us not to do. We can bear a day of pain, followed by a night of pain, and that again by a day of pain, and thus onward. But we can bear each day and night of pain only by taking each by itself. We can break each rod, but not the bundle. And the sufferer, in real great suffering, turns to the wall in blank despair when he looks too far on, and takes in a uniform dreary expanse of suffering, unrelieved by the blessed relief of even fanciful beginnings and ends.

The power and habit of taking comprehensive views is not in every case a desirable thing. It is well for us that we should look at our work in life in its parts rather than as a whole. Of course you understand what I mean. I am far from saying that we ought not many times to consider what is the drift and bearing of all our life, and of all we are doing in it. I mean that to avoid a fatiguing and disheartening result we should, for certain purposes, look not at the entire chain, but at each successive link of it. Of course we know each link will be succeeded by the next, but let us think of them one at a time. Let us be thankful for Saturday night, and let us enjoy it; and let us hold at arm's length the intruding thought of Monday morning, when the shoulder must be put

to the collar again. No doubt, in the work of life, every end is also a beginning. We rest for a little, perhaps only in thought and feeling, and then we take to our work again. But, thus doing, we are obeying God's great law of STEP BY STEP: Christ's kind purpose that though His children shall have many things to learn, to suffer, and to do, they shall have each as they can bear it.

Next, think of God's kingdom of grace. Here His kind way is the same. Taking first a general view, think how gradually the light of revelation came. Things were not told till men could bear them. Men were not told, at the beginning of Genesis, that the earth rolls round the sun; they were told that God made all things, sun and earth and all: *that* was the lesson for that day. It was enough; it was the spiritual truth, and there was no need to add a scientific fact which would have discredited the whole revelation in the minds of many. Even yet, strange to say, there are people who cannot bear that fact of science, cannot take it in. No doubt they are very stupid, but they can take in the truth that there is a creating God, which is a far greater thing. And, further, there was a progressive morality too: the standard of that, the requirements of that, were gradually raised. Where the light was little, and men acted according to the light they had, it was mercifully received of God. Poor Naaman was not forbidden to bow in the house

of Rimmon. And with Jael, zeal for God, though deformed with treachery and blood, was yet allowed to count as zeal for God. The Christian morality, no doubt, was all implied in the old law: but only a rare soul here and there knew it and discerned it. Doubtless a good deal of the Sermon on the Mount would sound very original in the ears that heard it; it cast a new light on sins of thought and heart which had never been seen before, although perhaps it ought to have been seen. Further on, you know gradually the apostles learned to discard their Jewish prejudices: got rid of the notion of a temporal Messiah, got rid of the idea of binding all men by the ceremonial law, got rid of the idea that God's favour was to be for evermore concentrated on the race of Abraham only; learned that Christ's glorious coming is not to be for far longer than they had thought in the first days after His ascension. Thus gradually did God say and teach many things to many men as they were able to bear them: that is, as they were able to comprehend what they meant, and to feel the force of the evidence which proved them, and then to accept them as guides of belief and life.

But it interests us more nearly to think how our Heavenly Father, in the dealings of His grace with the individual soul, holds ever in view what the soul can bear. How simple is the first broad statement of the way of salvation: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!" How easy to be

received is that first act of a saving faith in the Blessed Redeemer, the hearty coming, with nothing in the hand, and clinging simply to the Cross! Then that seems all; and in one true sense it is all; but the soul gradually sees farther on, into great depths of wisdom and knowledge, past finding out. The patient study of deep thinkers, prolonged through many years, has done no more than show how much there is behind: great volumes of difficult thought, hard for the unlearned reader to follow, carry us but a little below the surface of those things "which the angels desire to look into." Yet we thank God for this: that peace and rest may be found without penetrating into these deeps. And as with the discernment of spiritual truth, so with duties and endurances. As a matter of fact, in the experience of Christian people, these are sent as we can bear them: labour, temptation, sorrow. Sometimes, indeed, these seem too much: the burden is laid on that looks overwhelming, the perplexity arises which we cannot see our way through, the great loss comes under which there is the wish to die. Yet though it is all we can do, still, in experience, God's people are wonderfully held up: are enabled, somehow, to live through very dark days. For here there comes something beyond their own strength. When the burden is laid on which of themselves they could not bear, then their strength is increased to bear the burden. Very awful trials have come the way of some of God's best

children. Such have been called to pass through the fires of martyrdom. Do any of us feel as if we could face these? As little, we may be sure, did some of these noble ones, till the time came; and then the strength came with it. There is no strength in us, to do our Christian work, to wage our Christian warfare. And yet we must do the work and wage the warfare, *that* is certain. We thank God that we know where strength may be found. Let us earnestly ask, in faith, of Him; and the promise will be fulfilled anew that has been fulfilled times innumerable already, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." There is no more certain fact in history than that this has been so. And none have wondered more at it, none have been more unable to explain it by any worldly explanation, than those to whom the promise has come true. If we are Christ's people, the promise is to you and me. Let us hold to it: no doubt we shall need it many times. And then, things may come to us, burdens and sorrows, which, looking on to, we cannot understand how we are to bear. Yet we shall bear them by God's grace; and then, looking back on them, not be able to understand how we could have borne them. God send us faith to be sure of this! It is most true, that for all our spiritual life, "when we are weak, then are we strong:" strong in the Blessed Spirit's strength to do and endure when these are needed; and content and hopeful in the sense of present weakness and the prospect of

coming toil and trouble, because we know it is not to our own faint heart we need look for support against that day, but to One who is All-Wise and Almighty.

And if the shock is appointed to come to any of us, which will beat us at last; if the gathering weariness of life, growing as we go on through the pilgrimage, on the heavy foot and the heavier heart, grow at length into something more than we can bear; and the spirit, once hopeful and buoyant to endure, turns weak, and shrinks and breaks down:—and doubtless the end, in solemn death, is to most the finding life too much to bear any more: then remember that this is the final weaning from this world, which was always too much with us; and the thing that shall help us to turn away without lingering from the precincts of the clay. Life tends to grow heavier, as we go on, and we less able to bear it. And the last stage, in enfeebled faculties, worldly hopes gone, friends dying or falling off, and perhaps worldly means failing, is (apart from the grace of the Blessed Comforter) very sad and strange. Yet in the dark valley, where every earthly stay is broken, the Blessed Saviour, who Himself has died, will be with His failing servant, and will see that the trial be not too great. If the last pang of mortality wrung from a great and good man's lips his parting words, "I cannot bear it, let me rest," * then the bearing was all but over, and the rest

* Robertson of Brighton.

very near; the rest in that Golden City, little known but that Christ is there; where, doubtless, He will have much of the teaching and training of His servants to carry on and complete; and an infinity of things to tell them which they could not bear now.

We humbly pray, then, looking out on the unknown way before us, with all its possibilities of toil, perplexity, and sorrow, that He, who knows our frame, will not send us what is beyond our poor strength; and, forasmuch as He knows that the least duty or temptation is beyond any strength of our own, that He would sustain us inwardly by the precious communications of the Blessed Holy Spirit. So shall we, foolish and weak and sinful as we are, be wise for all perplexity; strong for all work; sanctified by all sorrow!

VII.

ST PAUL'S LAST DISAPPOINTMENT.

"At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me."—2 TIM. iv. 16.

WHO was this forlorn prisoner, that had not a human being to stand by him or take his part?

There have been men whom nobody would care to be identified with, because they were such discreditable acquaintances. But this was not one of these. This was a man with whom the best of mankind (you would say) might have been proud to stand shoulder to shoulder.

There have been selfish and useless men who never really put themselves about to serve a friend: never took any real trouble, or ran any real risk, for the sake of anybody except themselves: and so who could not reasonably expect anybody to do much for them. But this man was not one of these. For many years he had lived and worked for others: gladly spending and being spent in as unselfish labour as ever prematurely wore out and aged. Nor was the service

he had rendered his fellows a trivial service: like that of one who writes light chapters for their amusement. He had worked towards the ennobling of their worldly life: towards the salvation of their immortal souls.

For the desolate prisoner with whom no one cared to be identified was the Apostle Paul. The last historical incident in St Paul's life,—the last fact for which we have more than vague tradition,—is given us in these two verses which tell how the day came on which he had to stand before the bloodthirsty Emperor Nero, we do not know on what accusation: how on that day no human being stood by him but all failed him: but that Christ stood by him and bore him up, so that in such unlikely circumstances he was able to preach the gospel as of old: and the upshot was that he was delivered for a time; seemingly a short time. And my text gives us the story of St Paul's very last experience of human friends. "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me."

Long before, he had written an Epistle "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints:" had wished them grace and peace; and thanked God that their faith was "spoken of throughout the whole world." It is very strange to glance through that Epistle, and to think that here is what had come of it all. We know how St Paul felt when Roman Christians stood by him. The sight of them cheered

his heart. They came to meet him, some of these brethren, when he was anxiously drawing near to Rome: "whom when Paul saw, he thanked God and took courage." So we can easily understand what he felt now, when things were completely changed. Somewhat discouraged: a little bitter for the time: certainly and deeply disappointed. Yet these Roman friends were Christian people too: we have no reason to believe they had apostatized. But it was a terrible time. That wicked Emperor had (as is generally believed) set Rome on fire that he might enjoy the sight: and, finding that the proceeding was unpopular, then threw the blame of it upon the poor Christians, and inflicted on them tortures which can only be described as devilish. Indeed, the worst of the Roman Emperors had so far cast off all humanity, that they had come very near to being devils, as the New Testament uses the word. The possession of absolute power would make any bad man such. Now, in that awful season, St Paul's friends were frightened (which is natural): They were selfish (which is natural): They would persuade themselves that to stand by St Paul could do no good to him and might bring destruction on their own heads. And so naturally it comes about that the great Apostle's last recorded experience is the experience of a bitter disappointment, through the failure of those he had loved and trusted with his whole heart.

For there is nothing further told us in Holy Scrip-

ture. This is the last glimpse that Revelation gives us of St Paul. This is the last fact in his biography for which we have inspired warrant. Even the anticipations of a triumphant end which we read in this memorable last chapter of his writing or dictating are only anticipations: For anything said here, they may have been mistaken. It is a strange and sad ending of all we are told of his labours, his sufferings, his children in Christ, his friends for whom he had so toiled and prayed, the sermons he had preached, the letters he had written to them. "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me!"

Was St Paul growing querulous? Was his temper failing him somewhat when he put on everlasting record this unworthy failure of his friends; and when he ended the story with what looks like one of those questionable intercessions which one has known come from uninspired lips and sore hearts: "I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge?" No doubt, everything that is essentially human would be in the great apostle: and God's grace has always more to do in us, as we grow older. He had always the quick spirit that came of that tensely-strung nature: and his strength was less to bear troubles and daff aside wrong-headed obstacles now, a man of near three score and ten. There is just a tone of irritation about the First Epistle to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus, both written about this time: We can gather that he had to come in contact with men whom he

could not in any way like,—who rubbed him against the grain. He had been set free, as is generally believed, from his first imprisonment at Rome, in which the Acts of the Apostles left him. He had returned to Greece: he had re-visited the churches of Asia: he may even have penetrated as far into Western Europe as Spain. But now, after a time which we cannot in any way determine, he is again a prisoner at Rome: in far greater danger than before, and held in far more rigorous captivity. It was not, now, his "own hired house," where, save that his right wrist was chained to the soldier who kept him, and that writing the few lines with his own hand which closed an Epistle he sometimes thought of his chain and reminded others of it, he had virtual freedom. He was laid fast in prison now, even if not in the loathsome dungeon still existing, to which tradition points: and any day the utmost peril hung over him who was beyond question a chief leader of the suspected sect which was accused of firing the imperial city. And now it was that Paul the aged met his last-recorded disappointment: surely, after that experience, the very last disappointment he ever knew.

And he felt it, we can plainly see.

Several thoughts are suggested to us by the story.

One is, that it is not wise to expect too much of earthly friends: even of those whom you have served long and faithfully. You deal with weak and warped

material, dealing with fallen human nature. I do not know that you will find it materially more encouraging to deal with regenerated human nature. The pulpit is not the place from which it is fit that anything be said cynically; or in forgetfulness of that moral feebleness which cleaves to all, preacher and hearer together; and which makes our never-ending need of God's grace, and His Blessed Spirit. Yet it is well that all of us be humble: so shall we feel our need of that, and of all Christ's great salvation: and surely remembrances come which are humbling, here: thinking how we have failed in the grateful remembrance of the kindness of kind friends. Likely enough St Paul thought sometimes (for he was not raised above blameless infirmity), through those years of toil, writing those earnest Epistles, wishing himself accursed for his brethren's sakes, in dangers by land and perils in the sea, in stripes and stonings and prisons, that surely all this was counting up at least towards the establishment of a warm, close tie between himself and those for whom he so laboured, suffered, and prayed, that never could fail: whatever might come, he would always be supported by their love and gratitude. But you know the event; at least in the case of those friends at Rome to whom he had once written how in persecution, peril, and sword, he and they were "more than conquerors." More than conquerors in anticipation: cowardly ingrates in fact. Dear friends, let us not be hard on

them. Under less trial than theirs, we all tend to forget the kindnesses we experience: we fail in due gratitude for them: The very names of some that have helped us on our way hitherto have all but faded from our remembrance: There was a gush of thankful feeling at first, but that died away years since. We have thought, We never can forget that thoughtful kindness when we were ill, or in trouble: the wise word that hindered our taking a turning that would have proved a terribly wrong one: but not merely has it sometimes been that a friend's not doing all we wished to-day has effaced the remembrance of countless kind acts in the past, but even that little weaknesses in him which we ought never to have seen have served the same bad turn. The faithful servant, so helpful in sickness,—we do not know where she is now. The old fellow-student, who smoothed the first difficult steps into some new field of knowledge,—we have hardly thought of him for years. But probably there is no kind of service so soon forgotten, as the giving of spiritual help. The faithful minister who wore himself prematurely out in never-ceasing anxious toils for the good of the flock,—one has seen how fast his labours were forgotten. The great preacher on whose words crowds used to hang through thirty years,—it was sad to see how when he broke down and could speak to the heart no more, he was cast aside, and the interest readily transferred to some new-comer. I well knew

one, the most devoted of men through a ministry of near half-a-century, whom many of those he had best served failed and deserted when he agreed that the congregation should stand at praise and kneel at prayer. But it was not for any earthly reward the good man had toiled: and it was but a very little while till he was called to his rest and crown elsewhere.

If I were free to take my text detached from the passage in which it stands, as telling a story complete in itself, it would suggest a thought which is true: How at the first hearing of one who pleads for some great improvement, social, material, political, ecclesiastical, it is oftentimes found that no one stands by him, but all men forsake him. Every man who has pitched on an idea or plan the working-out of which would benefit his race, is at the outset in a minority of one; and has to endure the lot of minorities when they are aggressive, in abundant misrepresentation and abuse. It is strange, now that the country is covered with a network of railways, to think that not fifty years have passed since the man to whom the world mainly owes them was held up by the safe and judicious men of that day as a mischievous madman. Few indeed stood by him then. But what is nearest us touches us most. Every one praises our Hymnal now. Not a soul worth counting has a word against it. It is but a very few years since very few stood by

those who prepared it and gave it to the Church, amid abounding suspicion, misrepresentation, and ill-set gossip. But I cannot say that this is the proper meaning of my text; and it is not fit to twist a passage of God's Word aside and use it for a motto. I go on to another thought which is unquestionably suggested by the text as rightly understood: a thought of great comfort and warning which our meditation to-day may well be led up to, and in that find its climax.

The thought is this: Life, away from Christ, ends in disappointment. Your life and mine, unless we live to something higher than is seen, something above this world,—will be a going-down hill. Even St Paul's last recorded earthly experience was a bitter, searing disappointment. And yet St Paul was not wrong when years before he had written to the self-same Roman friends who thus disappointed him, that "experience worketh hope." He did not mean experience of them. No: after that sorrowful day he would not hope, if again brought before Cæsar, for much support or comfort *there*. But he meant experience of Christ. For, though the human friends failed him, the Saviour was steadfast: He did not fail. Let us recall the short story:

"At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me: that by me the preaching

might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom: To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

My dear friends, if we, in our work and trouble, trust to worldly stays, they will fail us. Even if, in our lesser trials, our friends do not fail us as St Paul's failed, but yield us all the support that human beings can yield another, that is not enough, that does not come near enough, when overwhelming trial comes, or when we must die. If we look for happiness, for our soul's portion, in earthly things, we shall be disappointed: and as years go on, as our powers of body and mind are weakened, as hopefulness grows less, as the buoyancy and lightheartedness leave us, as we turn less confiding and warm-hearted, as the temper grows harsher and more irritable, as we feel our peace more and more in the keeping of others, those of our own fireside, as troubles multiply and hem us in,—oh surely our life, if we have no religious stay, no real tie to Christ, must be an anti-climax. We shall be leaving behind us the better days: we shall be made to feel that we have had our pleasant worldly things, and that only the dregs of the cup are left now. A firm faith in Christ: a heart trained to some habit of real devotion: these are the only things that can, as a matter of fact, hold us up and cheer us amid the increasing

cares and flagging spirits of advancing years. There is not a more pitiable sight in this world, than an irreligious man growing old, or grown old.

If St Paul had had only his earthly friends to lean on, what a crushed-down creature he would have been when they failed him! As it was, their failure did but send him the more earnestly to the never-failing Saviour: and there he found strength and cheer. God so sanctify our worldly disappointments and sorrows as that all may send us to Christ, to meet the like experience!

That disappointment, we may well believe, was St Paul's last. The end was very near now. We do not know on what charge he was accused at his final hearing: any one would do. The trial was soon over: and the doom was death. As a Roman citizen he was safe from torture: and the consent of tradition points to beheading as the death he died, and has it that at very nearly the same time St Peter was crucified. Early in the month of June, in the year 68, they led the wearied apostle two miles out from the city to a spot which may be identified with strong probability. Then, a sepulchral pyramid marked it as the resting place of a single Roman: Now, it is the place of many English graves. Popery has done its little worst to deny to those buried there the comfort of Christian burial: The Protestant's grave in that foreign land must not be in consecrated earth. It is a vain and

impotent cruelty: it can do harm neither to mortal body nor to immortal soul. And the stoutest stickler for sacred places: the man who feels most tenderly the magic of associations: will not, if he be well read in his New Testament, judge that Christendom holds many spots of earth more touchingly hallowed than that on which St Paul died.

In that grand hymn of praise,—there never was grander uninspired, if uninspired it be,—which stands last in our Hymnal, and which (following old Christian usage) we call the *Te Deum*, there is mention made of three glorified companies, once human, that join in the praise of Christ.

> "The glorious company of the Apostles: praise Thee.
> "The goodly fellowship of the Prophets: praise Thee.
> "The noble Army of Martyrs: praise Thee."

It is honour enough, and far more than enough, for any born of woman, to be reckoned in only one of these. Such honour has Christ given His saints, ransomed from among men, that very many, men and women, have found place in one of these. To some, a small number indeed, has Christ given this bright, but humble glory, to be numbered in two: Such are St John, Apostle and Prophet; St Andrew, Apostle and Martyr. But to St Paul was this grace given, to be reckoned in all the three: in the glorious company of the Apostles, the goodly fellowship of the Prophets, and the noble army of Martyrs. And wheresoever

Christian people join in the public worship of God: Wheresoever, in solitary struggle or unutterable grief, a lonely soul opens the kindly pages of the New Testament, looking for guidance, help, or strong consolation, and turns naturally to the eighth of Romans or the fifth of Second Corinthians or the gentle sympathy and grace of Philippians from the first verse to the last: Whensoever, growing selfish, growing sluggish, we want to be heartened and stimulated and lifted up by a grand manfulness and a heroic unselfish devotion: and when at last, drawing near to death, we would have brought to us in few words the one Foundation on which sinking nature can rest then: Surely, then and there, and in times and places innumerable beside, Christendom all over, Christian folk will thank their Saviour for His faithful soldier and servant, St Paul, Apostle, Prophet and Martyr!

Let our parting ascription of praise be in his good words:

"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us: Unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

VIII.

AT NEW-YEAR'S TIME.

"Let us go on unto perfection."—HEB. vi. 1.

WOULD it be possible, I wonder, beginning this new year, for all of us to make a great step in advance in spiritual attainment: becoming not a little better, but an immense deal better? Are we not getting content to be valetudinarians morally and spiritually; to be (so to speak) in a frail and unsatisfactory state of religious health and strength: not to be at all what as Christian people with our advantages we ought to be, and not even to expect our neighbours to be any better than ourselves? It is good to be contented with moderate things as concerns our worldly circumstances, and standing, and estimation: but it is not good that people who profess to be Christians and hope to be saved should get into the way of being satisfied to rest at a low mark of devoutness, spirituality, and Christian principle and practice. And perhaps, as we go on, we are all more or less tempted with just that temptation. Some kind of rough idea takes possession of us that a man

must just work out what is in him,—what comes of his constitution and his circumstances: and that notwithstanding all that is said about God's grace, we need not look for it that religious people shall be much better than people who do not pretend to have any religion: but that they too will be many times very difficult to get on with, very unfair, unkind, unreasonable; and in short exceedingly unlike what Christ was, and what He wishes all who bear His Name to be. Now might we not, at a marked season like this, at a fresh milestone in our way, resolutely shake ourselves free from that slothful acquiescence in things being far inferior to what they ought to be; and resolutely try after a greatly higher and happier and kindlier and nobler life? Might we not take for our motto this year these words which I have taken for text this morning: "Let us go on unto perfection!" You see the writer of that Epistle did not think that when people had got (as they fancied) religion enough to save them, they might then stand still. They must keep going on: and this for one reason among many others, that thus only could they be sure they were on the right foundation at all. But I put *that* serious consideration apart meanwhile: and take the text only as suggesting the idea of aiming, from time to time, at a higher mark and tone of spiritual life: how fit a thing that would be, and how happy.

And surely many Christian people know but too well, that in fact they are not trying to go on to per-

fection at all. They are not even aiming at the top of the tree. Now, let us think of ourselves. We are, probably all of us, quite content to think of kind and good qualities in our fellow-creatures, such as we hear and read of sometimes,—and then to reflect how good and excellent these people are, without remembering that we are bound to be followers of them, so far as they are followers of Christ. We should never look at a beautiful Christian character, or hear of a noble Christian life, without feeling that we too ought to be reaching after all that. Yet we know that it is required of each of us to be like Christ: to have in us the mind which was in Him. And then, knowing all this, instead of aiming at perfection, or even at our own very best, do we not deliberately aim at mediocrity in spiritual things? We know, perhaps, that our Church services might be far heartier, yet never determinedly try to make them so: that our life might be far holier and more devout,—far kinder and more helpful to those around us: We talk about what a grand thing self-renunciation is, yet deny ourselves as little as may be: sometimes approvingly read the words "in honour preferring one another," yet now and then push our services and claims strongly forward, and are angry at some small slight. Now, my Christian brethren, if we got the spirit of my text: if we resolutely and constantly aimed at the highest degrees of grace: even if we did not reach the perfection at which we aimed, we should at the

least lift ourselves greatly above this dull dead level. In spiritual attainment we shall not do any good, unless we try to do our very best.

One thing I am sure of: If we are now by God's grace to reach a higher level, we must try for it cheerfully and hopefully. There is no use in making ourselves heavy-hearted about the poor progress we have made down till this time. We are sorry for it: but that is all done. We leave it behind, as we leave the old year: we leave its failures, its sins and follies: we shall try to forget them all, and to make far better of the time to come. To moan unduly long over the past is not the way to make progress. St Paul was most right when he said, "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before."

There is one thing in which we might try for this higher level: It is zeal and heart and reality in God's worship. I am pleased and thankful that we have so much of these as we have: but we have not yet got out of our services all the help and strengthening and comfort we might get. For one thing: Look how full this church sometimes is: Well, it ought to be as full always. Large as this church is,* I am able to say from a very thorough knowledge of the city and parish, that if all were here who say they worship here, the church would not hold them. Now, there are

* It holds 2500.

Sundays when it is not filled as our congregation ought to fill it. We must make up our mind that we shall not allow little excuses to keep us away from God's house. We must expect to get good from coming: determine to get good from coming. We must rouse ourselves up to an energetic attendance on ordinances. It will not do just to come into church and sit down and expect the minister to do the work: You have a great work to do for yourselves. Let us join in the Praise with a will. You know how hearty the praise is sometimes here: when every voice seems to join in it, and the place is flooded with joyful sound. At that Evening Service for the Children a little ago, I felt that if there had been nothing whatever but the Praise, we should have had a helpful and enjoyable service. The greatest preacher in America has just published a book in which he says it is the singing that does most good in his church: the great volume of sound in which thousands of voices and hearts are lifted up to God together. But that can only be, when every soul in church feels he has his part to do in that offering of praise, and does his part with heart and voice. No worshipper, with the least music in his nature, should dream of being silent when praise is going up: that is, in fact, of holding back his share of the sacrifice. Then, let us pray with all our heart. I know the difficulty: the temptation to listen to the prayers, specially offered by a stranger, instead of joining in them: Every one of us, I believe, sometimes

does that. But it *is* possible, by God's blessing, to join with all the heart and purpose of soul even in a prayer which is new to you: Many of Christ's best people can thankfully testify that: You have all joined with that unspeakable earnestness in the short prayer offered by a dying bed amid the last sufferings: Now, if we could but put that vitality, that prevailing power with God, into all the innumerable prayers that go up here! Let us make up our mind to pray with the full expectation,—I will venture to say more,—with the full determination, that we shall get what we ask: I say this, of course, only of vital spiritual blessings, in asking which we are sure we are asking that God's will be done: Let us pray for these with that earnest heart and intention which shall bring down of a surety the thing we ask. I am not commending physical vehemence in prayer: that is to me inexpressibly hateful: but while the words are calmly said by the minister,—and surely his voice can bring them before your mind just as well as a printed page could,—weight them with your desires and needs,—wing them upward to God with the impulse of your heart's devotion,—take them for your own and silently say them to your Saviour: How heavenly a place the church would be, if it were in such a truth as *that* the house of Prayer! As for the Sermons you hear, Well, I am sure that all of us who preach them would be thankful if they were infinitely better: yet they seem to interest most of you too: and surely there

are few Sundays,—there is no Sunday,—on which between scripture lessons and these discourses you do not hear a plain statement of the Gospel of peace through Jesus Christ and by the working of the Blessed Spirit. Furthermore, an increase in zeal and earnestness in the congregation would wonderfully strengthen and stimulate those who minister to it. Let us be sure of this: that many Christian people have got and are continually getting great help out of God's public worship: getting patience, and calmness, and strength, and comfort, and light, out of holy sacrament and solemn service. All these good things are there to be had: and why not by us as well as by any? We are not straitened in God: not in Christ: not in the Holy Spirit. Let us resolve, this first service of the year, that by great earnestness, and by mighty prayer, we shall find far more of them all than ever before in His House this year!

There is another thing in which we might try for a far higher level of reality and warmth: This is that kindliness which St Paul so strongly commended as the greatest of the Christian graces; and in fact, in the sight and experience of us human beings, just the very visible outcome and resultant of the whole higher life in us. Perhaps the tendency to use a somewhat high-flown mode of expression in speaking of this grace, has hindered our realising what a homely, lowly, every-day thing it ought to be,—smoothing the hourly

intercourse between neighbours,—taking the sharp edge off a smart saying, or a keen estimate of a man or woman,—reaching everywhere, and sweetening wherever it goes,—making everybody more cheerful, more hopeful, and so more useful. When we talk of Faith, Hope, and Charity,—when we talk of Love,—it sounds a far bigger thing and an infinitely less real thing, than when we say Kindliness. That is the right word: we all know what it means. And I want you to think of it in its homeliest and most every-day manifestations: not as it appeared in great missionaries, like that sainted hero Bishop Patteson of the South Seas, worthy to wear the martyr's crown side by side with St Paul himself,—we must rise to the theological word *there: that* transcends all daily experience: but as it ought to appear in commonplace people going through the rubs of ordinary life.

Now, might we not all attain to a far higher measure of this greatest yet humblest grace? We are not nearly kind enough to one another. We are far sharper at seeing a neighbour's faults, than at seeing his good points. There is a great deal of good about most people. Let us grow sharp-eyed to see it. Let us be forward to give them credit for it. Let us talk about it; instead of making our talk too much of the follies and failings we see. Now do not some people sometimes speak of their fellow-creatures, as if you were to speak of the sun and make mention of nothing but his spots? Even when average humanity

does anything that seems really malignant (which unquestionably is the spirit of the Devil), it is commonly through having taken up some stupid misapprehension or mistake. And the power of kindliness to do good is wonderful. It is only by kindness you will do good to any wrong-doer: I mean of those we are likely to have anything to do with: no doubt there are awful specimens of a devilish falsehood and cruelty and obstinacy in evil, which demand the stern hand and hard blow: God save us from the knowledge of such. And assuredly, in the whole realm of religious life, angry scolding will not do. Reproof goes against the grain with all of us: and enviable is his skill who is able to get the needed medicine of the sense of wrong-doing into another man's blood and soul, without the bitterness of its taste having been remarked at all. Then, shall we try this year to take more real interest in one another's welfare? I am sure, if we have lately had to bear severe pain ourselves, it made us ashamed that we had not sympathised more with others in pain. When we have children of our own, we feel we ought not to have been so tired when other people told us long stories about their children. My Christian friends, we *are* One Family: we are all wonderfully alike, with all our differences: Even in a congregation where the learned and the unlearned meet, there is a great deal of plain homely human nature for the core and vital essence of each and all: and I do not hesitate to say (not

using theological language, but the current tongue), in that unspoiled human nature a great deal that is good and kind: congenial material for God's grace to work on: Only let it have more way, and cheer and help us all. There are people who if they hear a bad thing said of a person, will go and tell him. Now, suppose you try the other way for a change. When you hear a neighbour kindly spoken of,—something good said of him, go and tell him *that*. It is a far better way. Giving him credit for some little good, is the best way to make him try to be better. And if people were happier, they would be better. To diffuse a pure happiness, to take the burden off anxious hearts, would make a grand and blessed Reformation: the only right Reformation, because it would begin with mending each individual soul. People no doubt are often miserable because they are bad: but no doubt they are often bad, often harsh and snappish, often drunken, often dishonest, because they are miserable. If things be going against a man: if his nerves are rasped daily and hourly by sordid worries: in the case of nine out of ten all God's grace will not keep him sweet-tempered.

But I can suppose some one saying,—Now is the thing that keeps us straight in all these little matters, and that looks out in our keeping straight, the great Grace of Charity? Yes, it is: and nothing less. It is God's grace that keeps us right in the smallest things. We are not in the fashion of here calling it

by so dignified a name. We speak of kindliness, tolerance, good-temper, sweetness of nature: but it is no other than the great king and flower of all good gifts in this homely disguise. This is the very thing of which St Paul was speaking, when he said that other things, the grandest, would go, but THIS abide for ever: that "now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three, but the greatest of these is charity." We hardly thought that in so familiar things as the kind word and the kind face of a good man or woman we could see the most excellent grace of the Blessed and Holy Spirit. But it is even so. Even so.

And who is there that will say that these are little things? Are they little things that make all the difference between this life, with all its troubles, being the hopeful way to a happy heaven; and its being the wretched road to the hell it would anticipate? Not every Christian can hope to be in their happy number, the sunshiny ones, scarcely touched by the Fall, or regenerated from the cradle, who diffuse kindliness and hopefulness and cheerfulness around them wherever they go, and make all that know them stronger to do work and resist temptation: who put their hand to any perplexity and it is cleared up; who talk with the churlish and he grows generous, with the rude and wrong-headed and on the instant he sees and acts with the wise pleasantness which is the very flower of Charity: Few indeed *they* are among the millions of the Race. But even to try in that direction would

be twice-blessed. And such a trial could not wholly fail.

Just in a sentence, one thing more shall be named: that great thing, self-renunciation. If Christian people stopped thinking so much of themselves and what is due to them, and tried to do God's will and to be like Christ: How much more good they would do: How much more credit and honour they would get (taking even that low ground): How infinitely happier they would be! Think of only the one thing, "In honour preferring one another:" What a change it would make to get *that* accepted by great and small! No man trying by some small shabby art to push himself a little before another: No man trying to advertise his good deeds (which probably he did not do): Every one kindly appreciative of what another does: Running down unknown! There is no more humbling manifestation of human weakness than in the great field I have just indicated: Now, if all that could be got rid of, finally, what a sweetening of Christian life, and Church life, and professional life, and business life, and all life, would follow! And the Spirit of Christ, if it had way, would end all that, utterly. No doubt, if there is a soul on earth to be sorry for, it is the selfish, self-seeking, self-advertising soul. He continually scourges himself. But the kind, frank, hearty, self-forgetting recognition of others' services, blesses giver and taker: a glow of warmth and blessing from the very heart of Christ Himself!

If we would all reach this better way, which I have sought this morning to commend, the sum is that we pray earnestly for the Holy Spirit; and then really watch and work: Make it a business to grow better and happier, and make up our mind that we shall: examine ourselves sharply yet not despondingly; and when we find something wrong, say that must stop. And thus, helping each other, bearing with each other, seeing the good that is in each other, not expecting too much of each other,—though still far away from perfection, how much holier and happier we might be!

My brethren, a clergyman's work is not done when each Sunday he conducts divine service decorously: so that competent persons may say, as they may say in so many of our churches now,—Well, there is some culture,—some knowledge of liturgical expression,—some share of catholic thought and devotion: the whole order is something infinitely higher and better than the worship of the Church even twenty years ago. But is the congregation growing better: going on to perfection: really putting down old sins and gaining new graces? If not, the prayers may be patterns of simple and devout felicity: the praise be all that could be wished: the lessons well chosen and well read: the sermons interesting, stimulating, and short: and yet the services of that church a dead failure.

God grant it be not so here, for Christ's sake!

And now, dear friends, to whom I have stood for all these years in a relation that ought to be so real, as your servant and pastor, as I wish you all a Happy New Year, I wish and pray that you may be going on unto perfection!

January 4, 1874.

IX.

MANLINESS.

"Quit you like men: be strong."—1 Cor. xvi. 13.

YOU have honoured me, Volunteers, by asking that, in the fulfilment of my easy duty as your chaplain, I should this evening conduct Divine service specially for your sake; and it has been a true satisfaction to me, however imperfectly, to do so. For I have learned, with advancing years, that none of us will ever do anything, or say anything, exactly as it ought to be done or said; and God knows *that*, and yet uses us poor men: the sense of our unworthiness should keep us humble, but never deter us from doing our best, nor dishearten us, though *that* have many flaws. We have joined in praise and prayer; we have listened to Lessons of God's inspired Word; and the time has come at which it is fitting that I should address to you some words of exhortation as touching your vocation as citizen-soldiers. After more than usual of that perplexity which preachers know, I have been led to take for the subject of your thoughts to-night a matter of special interest to you: and surely

not without interest either, to the multitude of your fellow-citizens by whom you are surrounded: My subject is the Manliness of True Religion.

There is not now, about our great Volunteer army, the fresh interest of a new movement. *That* must needs go when the new movement becomes an old one. And though all experience shows us how vain are our calculations of the future; and how foolish it is to make sure that because things in the political world seem tranquil, the great curse and blight of war may not come, speedily and awfully; yet speaking as human beings speak, we may venture to say that there appears no present danger of any invasion of our long-inviolate shores. There is no need, just now, that I should go into what may be called the philosophy of such a citizen-army as this; and the less need, that, when last I was called to fulfil this duty, I set out, as fully and clearly as I could, what seemed to me the truth on that matter; and what was then said has the less call to be repeated, because it is easily accessible to any who may desire to recall it. The Volunteer army is now like ordinary human life: It has settled to its pace, as middle-aged folk have, and it is going on in the regular routine. The temptations to which it is subject are the temptations which come of that stage. There is flagging zeal; the fresh interest of the first start has much abated; there must needs come the falling off of such as lack steadfastness (a sifting process *that*); and apart from any such

desertion, the day comes when the most loyal volunteer finds that the growing home-claims and home-cares of advancing life constrain him to leave the old drill and the old field-days to a younger generation. The way stretches before us, the dusty way; and the counsels most fitly to be addressed to any congregation of volunteers by their chaplain are counsels not for the beginning of the work, but for its diligent carrying on. Could I find, anywhere, better or worthier, than I found in that text? A good volunteer ought to be a pattern of Christian manliness.

There is nothing muffish about true religion. There is no whining or cant about it. Nothing to make a man bow his head like a bulrush, or slink about creation with a hang-dog look as if he had no business there. There is everything in it to make a man walk Christ's earth His soldier and servant, feeling that no prince or potentate has a better right to be here, or comes on a holier errand than you, doing the work Christ gives you. There is nothing mean, sneaky, or shabby about true religion. It is a downright brave and generous thing—manly in the best sense; not meaning what man often is, but the grand ideal we have in our minds of what man ought to be. There is not a fancy that has done more to prejudice generous and brave young spirits against religion than that most groundless fancy that religion is an unmanly thing. I grant you that some who make a great profession of it are poor, dishonest, spiteful creatures

enough; but it was not the Spirit of God that made them so. Let us give all honour to the good and able men who have been raised up to bear gallant testimony to the manliness of being prayerful, devout, conscientious, afraid to do wrong, not afraid to be laughed at for doing right—all honour to the names of Arnold, Kingsley, and Tom Brown. But, indeed, they did no more, these apostles of Christian manliness, than turn the eyes of men back to a far greater than they—that brave Apostle Paul, physically so weak, morally and spiritually so mighty, who sketched in my text a Christian man's fit demeanour. It is not, —Sneak about the world like sour whipped curs: It is,—"Quit you like men: be strong."

It is a short text. A short text is a good thing; it is like a sharp point—it gets into one's memory and sticks in it. And if you can find words that express your meaning, they cannot be too few. But my text, in fact, is a great deal shorter than those of you would think who look at it in our English New Testament. As St Paul wrote it, it is just two words. And yet I do not know that it would be possible, in our tongue, to give its sense more briefly than we have it. And the sense is fairly as well as briefly given. You have before you exactly what St Paul meant.

Now, taking a first broad look at the matter of Christian manliness, there is a thought that comes straightway. It is this: that in a great deal that has been said about it, we are made to feel to what an

extent people speak according to their constitution and temperament. And this is specially a subject as to which we must refuse to accept, as if it were the whole truth, a good deal of what has been said by its zealous advocates. Great robust men, with a powerful physique, with the digestion of an ostrich, with a tremendous circulation, and no nervous system to speak of at all, have commended what has been called a muscular Christianity in terms which shew an entire absence of sympathy with that great majority of the human race whose temperament is more sensitive—which shew even an utter lack of the faculty of understanding such. Now, this will not do. It will not do to represent manliness, as St Paul meant it, as a thing simply unattainable by the best of the race. Many a frail, weakly man, tremulously eager, and capable of feeling that was all but hysteric: many a delicately-organised woman, in whom the soul dominated the body, and shone through it, and wore it out as the keen sword does its scabbard; has attained and exhibited a heroic manliness, in the noblest and truest sense of that word. It is in the soul that true manliness dwells: not in nerve nor muscle nor animal tissue. The bravest of the brave have been men who would have been singularly inefficient in a charge with bayonets fixed. If manliness could go only with a brawny frame, and a stentorian voice, then St Paul, who wrote my text, was very little of a man. Do you think the world ever saw the mortal who bore

himself manlier than he? No doubt, it is a great thing to have that physical basis of a constitution firm and strong, on which all the moral and spiritual is to be raised. It is a great thing to have that; and the day may come, when, through the general improvement of the race, through the physical education of it, notably helped by this volunteer movement, the material in us will always help the spiritual, and cheer it, and lift it up, instead of hindering, and clogging, and stifling it as now in too many of us. But when I think of some men, known in history: of the shaky Nelson, of the super-nervous Mill, of the little contemptible-looking creature that we know for the great apostle Paul: when I do no more than think of the two most renowned preachers that have spoken from this pulpit for many a day;* I feel that there may be true and heroic manliness where physical nature is frail. The intellectual and moral is the essential manhood.

But we must get on. "Quit you *like men*," says St Paul, recognising the certain fact that man is not all bad: that there are some remains in us of the Divine likeness in which we were made, even now amid our ruin; and that in these we recognise our better and truer self. He does not here ask us to try to be like angels, or superior intelligences of any degree. The day may come for *that;* but just yet, each

* The Dean of Westminster and Dr Macgregor of St Cuthbert's, Edinburgh.

of you young fellows is asked only to try to be like the ideal man, the proper man; and the apostle, for his present purpose, singles out one thing, one characteristic, of the ideal man—"Quit you like men: *Be strong.*"

There are other things besides that which well become a man—Kindness, Humbleness, "mild behaviour and humanity." To "be strong" by no means sums up all that becomes a man. But, beyond question, it does beseem the right man; and we are to fix our attention upon one thing at a time.

Now, Volunteers and all of you, what did St Paul want when he bade you be strong? What are the main and best characteristics which the text recommends to us all? It is a comfort to think that the text tells us to do something which *can* be done by us, through God's grace; or we should not be told to do it. God never tells all mankind to be six feet high; nor to be muscular or agile; nor to be so many inches round the chest. But he tells us all, men and women alike, to be strong: and how?

Morally strong; strong with a grand strength which the Holy Spirit will work in us if we ask Him, amid our own great weakness. Let us sketch the lines of it.

Well, broadly, what St Paul desired to have in us all is courage: downrightness, straightforwardness, truthfulness, honesty in word and deed, faithfulness to our convictions, manfulness to face what is unplea-

sant, what is difficult, what is painful, when we see we ought; some measure of what is called back-bone, which is quite different from an unreasonable and obstinate crotchetiness; self-respect, firmness in holding what is right, not wheeling about, either in opinion or behaviour, like a weathercock, at every breath of rumour as to what this man or the other may think or say. When the time comes, which probably has not come yet to you young men, but which will come with the cares of middle age, in which you will feel overburdened and beaten, and ready to break down and give up altogether,—great and good men have known that temptation,—then resist it. *That* is to be strong. Fight against it in God's strength. It will be hard, but never give in. Struggle up from your bed when you are little fit for it. Go at the task from which you shrink, and by God's grace you will do it. It is in the will the strength is. A man or woman wearied out and broken down with long toil and sorrow may yet be strong in the sense of St Paul. Be brave and strong in God's strength and courage, wrought by His Spirit, promised to all. No one need be timid and mean-spirited and sneaky, with all that comes of *that* —the vile trickery, the lying and slandering. Do right, and trust in God; and cut off all miserable calculations as to what people may say about you. It is not without reason that, by common consent, *coward* was for many a year held the most reproachful name that could be applied to a man; nor that, in a classic

tongue, the word that conveyed all that best became a man, in character and life, was *courage*. It does not mean, that renowned word, the mere insensibility to danger which is very much the outcome of stupidity, and of a coarse organisation, and in which some of the least lovable of the brutes exceed any man. It means the moral fibre that made the saint and martyr. It means the domestic heroism that holds on through weary years of sorry calculations and sordid shifts, and never gives up till the poor widow sees her children at length educated and started in life, and knows her work is done. It means the bravery that made a sufferer bear sharp agony without word or sign, lest some over-tasked brain-worker should be disheartened, or perhaps the holiday of some little children spoiled. It means a patient endurance that is beyond the courage of the battlefield; that hardly any mortal will ever hear of; yet surely the very thing that was in the view of the great apostle when he bade the Christians of Corinth "Quit you like men: be strong!"

St Paul would not have you quarrelsome, or touchy; anything but that. Yet, in this world, being such as it still is, it is most right that a Christian man should be able to hold his place, and defend himself against aggression, whether by insolent words or unjust deeds. It is fit that, upon occasion, you should show spirit. And if you make it apparent that you are able to defend yourself, you will not be presumed upon, unless

by very coarse natures; and your better plan is to draw off from these, and to have nothing to do with them. But a blustering, hectoring, loud manner is just the opposite of manly. And if there be human being less manly than the bully, it is the sulky creature that is always taking the pet. *That* is to be weak, not strong. The strength St Paul commended will never appear more genuinely than in a man's holding the mastery over himself. The passionate man is the slave of his passion; and in his utmost violence he is no more a strong man than is the poor wretch in a fever when it takes six men to hold him.

There is another thing about which I wanted to say a word: it is manliness in your special religious duties and services—manliness towards God. And when I was considering how I should put this idea before you, I came on a passage in a book I was reading,* just published by a great American preacher, which says so exactly what I wanted to say, that I shall read you some sentences of it:—"Humble yourself before God. But I beseech you to avoid that kind of crawling, that prostration, that takes the very manhood out of a man. I don't think God wants to have a man crawl before Him like a worm. I don't think He is any more pleased to see that than you would be to see your children act so. I have seen men who seemed to think that if they emptied themselves before God, and made themselves mean, and said all manner of self-

* Beecher's "Lectures on Preaching:" Second Series.

abasing things, it would fit them for their work. No, manliness! No doubt every man has enough to confess; but God wants men to come to Him as though they were His sons. I am a son of God. I will confess my sin; but I will stand before Him as His son still. I am willing to be chastised; but I am not willing to crawl in the dust, as if I were not an immortal creature." Now, I ask you to lay that to heart, young volunteers. It is true and right. Utterly eschew that unmanly whine in which some foolish people seem to think prayer should be said. Rely upon it, God does not want us to make ourselves as contemptible as may be when we go into His presence. He made us a little lower than the angels. Quickened by His breath, bought with Christ's blood, dwelt in by the Holy Spirit, we are not wholly mean. Yea, destined to live for ever, there is nothing in all this visible universe that is so awful as we!

Now, Christian friends, let us, by God's grace, strive to gain something of this manliness of spirit which is within the reach of us all: "strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness." Be strong in His strength, to do work, to resist temptation: brave and manly to obey God's will in spite of what hindrances may come. Not men only, but women too, have, in that better strength that comes from above, been enabled to do more than a man's part, not in the flames of martyrdom merely, but

through slow years of toil and privation, weary calculations and sickening worry, never ending till the last rest of all. It was but the other day I stood by a dying bed, where lay one in two or three minutes to be in the presence of God. There was the little worn figure—how little; and the thin old face, with the deep lines of care, traced by near fourscore years of anxious toil, often with a sick heart, yet borne so uncomplainingly and bravely. And I thought, there and then, She has quitted herself like a man, God knows! She has been strong, that poor weak woman: yea, heroic! And it seemed as though the simple yet solemn words of the grand Allegorist were fitting there. "*She* also had a brave victory over her enemy: Let HIM grant that dwelleth above that we fare no worse, when we come to be tried, than she!"

Go on, then, Christian soldiers; and every one here may be Christ's soldier, in his or her degree. "To be weak is miserable, doing, or suffering": "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." The Banner goes before you that has rallied to itself the purest and noblest of the race: the Cross of Jesus, to which looks up the blessed Communion of saints; our Token that we are not ashamed of Christ crucified. Saviour—Intercessor—Example: Pattern of all that ever was good, kind, pure, manful, or heroic: let us strive evermore to be like Him, by the grace of the Blessed Spirit!

X.

THE NECESSITY FOR HOLINESS.

"Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."—HEB. xii. 14.

THE meaning of that little scrap of Holy Scripture is quite complete in itself. There is no need to be afraid, here, lest we be building upon a few words dislocated from their proper place some doctrine which if you read them as part of the entire passage in which they stand, you would see they were never meant to express at all. And besides this, we know quite well that it is not here only that we are taught the truth, so plain and reasonable, yet practically so forgot, that you must be holy before you can enter into that blessed life and that peaceful home into which all professed Christians vaguely hope that somehow they are to go at last, and therein to abide always. All God's revelation is instinct with that same strain. No doubt those who have undertaken to explain God's revelation have sometimes failed to discern that the fact is so. I have not time to talk about teachers in

other countries and other ages: but it is not so many years since over large tracts of this land men fancied they preached the whole gospel when they set out that the only way in which we can get our sins forgiven is by faith in our Divine Redeemer and His atoning sacrifice; and, not discerning that this sure and certain truth is just half the gospel, they looked askance on those who went on to say that to Christian faith there must be added Christian virtue. Yet this is just the other half of the Gospel of Christ. We, each of us, must be renewed and sanctified by the blessed Spirit of God before we can enter God's presence. Of course the separation of these two parts of the message of salvation was only in theory; that is to say, it existed only in people's talk, and never in fact. Justification, with its title to heaven, could never be dissociated in fact from sanctification, with its meetness for heaven. You may think of the two things each by itself, and discuss them as though they were things apart. But, as they exist, they are tied together indissolubly by the eternal fiat of God, all-pure and almighty. The one never was without the other, and never will be through all eternity. Forgiven must be Holy; that is the unchangeable truth of God.

But if we took that in, and really felt what it means, there would be something in it which each of us, if any way intelligent, and conscientious to ourselves,

must feel very strange and startling. Do you think that we should do for heaven as we are? Do you think that we are holy? Or do you not rather know how little right our poor imperfect lives have to such a word: How far we are below the standard we have even in our own minds of what we ought to be, each hour of each day: What a blank desolate lack there is of anything like living up to Christ's example and rule! Think of the pettiness and poorness of our daily life: lifted up, perhaps, now and then for a little while by prayer or praise, by sacrament or sacred hymn, to some brief glimpse of blessed possibilities, of a serener and diviner and far happier air, but too commonly dragged on in the debasing succession of small irritations, of unworthy tempers, of poor ends sought by poor means, of weary care, of wretched self-conceits and self-abasements, all shewn too plainly on the aging face, not care-worn merely, but contracted and ignoble, and lacking the bright hopefulness and ready sympathy and upward aspect of earlier days: and say, is all this like heaven,—is it like the Communion of Saints,—is it like the Beatific Vision? Here and there, among the millions of the race, you may have known one and another, sweet-natured beyond all wont by birth, and reared amid the sunniest and kindliest surroundings (I speak of grace, not of nature or fortune), who seemed but a very little lower than the angels here, and who (you thought) would need but little change to grow meet for the company of

angel and apostle, prophet and martyr. But with most, what a change there would need to be! For there it stands, a great solemn law; in the nature of things not to be reversed, not to be suspended, not to have exceptions made from it in favour of this one and that; "Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

Now, of course, you know, and probably know from what has passed in your own mind, that many people, when reminded of all this, think that though they are not anything that can be called holy now, yet in a little time at the last, in a few weeks of illness before they die, they will attain to a state of mind and feeling wonderfully different from what has ever been in their experience during the days and years of active life, and so become ready and fit to enter heaven. And this vague thought does much to prevent any real anxiety at finding that the great sign of the fact that they are forgiven is quite absent from their heart and conduct. It is a bad symptom, no doubt, of how things now are: but things will be all set right by and by. So it comes that no real daily effort is made to put down what is wrong in us; no real effort, and sustained endeavour, after a better and holier mind and behaviour, forthwith; no true labour to grow in grace as one grows in knowledge, by our own exertion, helped by the Holy Spirit. And God forbid that any frail mortal should venture to limit His mercy in Christ,

or to say in any case what He may or may not be pleased to do. A sinful human being may be enabled, by one supreme act of faith to cling to the Cross, to believe on the Redeemer, in one moment of time, for what we know, in the last moment of life; and though pardon the fullest would not make fit or able to be happy in heaven with an unchanged heart, yet so sudden a change may be in that moment wrought upon that soul's whole being and tendencies by God's Spirit, that in that moment it may be made fit for heaven. But that, it may be said confidently, is not the usual way. Such a case is a thoroughly exceptional case. God's way is to form character slowly and gradually; and as classical proverb said that "No one all at once grew very bad," so does Christian experience testify that few there are who all at once grow very good. As it was taught us when children, sanctification is a *work*—prolonged, gradual, as the rule. And we have no right to expect exceptional things. I venture to say that we, with our light, our privileges, have practically as little reason to expect that in any moment of our life, the last or not, we shall all at once be made holy, as that, when we desire to master a new language, we shall be enabled to do so, not by patient and prolonged labour, but by a sudden gift of tongues.

It may be confessed, quite frankly, that most of us have wished, both for ourselves and others, that this law of holiness were relaxed; or rather, perhaps it

should be said, that holiness were a thing attainable more rapidly—with less of sustained and often disheartened exertion—and by occasional large advances rather than by slow degrees. We have thought that it would be well for many if the doctrine of justification by faith were the whole gospel and not the half only; if human beings did not need to be holy before they can be happy; or if a sudden change at death gave the holiness which was sadly lacking before, even in such as trusted they had believed in Christ and thus were saved. It is here, probably, that very many take refuge, thinking of departed friends, and thinking of their own departure. We are thankful for that statement in the Catechism, "that the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness:" a statement supported by one solitary text of Scripture,—the text which speaks of "the spirits of just men made perfect,"—and which, you see, makes no mention of this being *made perfect* as something done of a sudden in the act of entering the better world. Doubtless, in that solemn change from this life to the other, there will be a great spiritual advance. Such a promise as that those permitted to see our Lord as He is will therein be made like Him, assures us of *that*. But even the being "made perfect in holiness" is a change only in degree; it is not a sudden attainment, for the first time, of something unknown before. We must have had some little holiness in life, to be made perfect at death; we must have

been reaching forth in that direction here. The blessed life above is a continuation of the life here, and a development of what germs of good were in it; but we have no ground to believe that we have but to die that we may begin to care for things which we never cared for here at all, and be happy in doing service to God which here we found irksome, and be inspired with affections towards God and man of which we had here no rudiments, and get clear views and measures of truths and realities of which we had here no glimpse in that fashion at all. Lifted up to far higher degrees of what we had here attained of goodness, we may hope to be; but still the same individual beings, the same in soul and spirit, in habits, likings, dispositions, in the whole bent of the idiosyncrasy. Most solemn is the truth; casting a momentous interest on that daily round of little duties, cares, temptations, which is our life here. We are ready to think that it would be pleasant if we could all get to heaven at last; and that perhaps God may, after all, kindly let His creatures, however sinful their lives in this world, find entrance there. But that cannot be: the state of each of us through eternity will be just a continuation and development of what we are now. We are growing now into what we shall be for ever. We are forming into the very beings that we shall be when we rise from our graves at the resurrection; that we shall be when we stand before Christ's judgment seat; that we shall be when we enter upon our ever-

lasting state. We have no encouragement at all in God's Word to fancy that at death some sudden transformation is to pass on our whole moral and spiritual nature and character, so that though we are not Christian people and not fit for heaven up to our last moment in this world, we yet may open our eyes on eternity and find ourselves meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. If we are allowing bad thoughts and affections and desires to get a place in our hearts now, they will keep that place for ever. If we are growing into a character of worldliness, or pride and self-sufficiency, or impurity, or hard selfishness, or ungodliness, or suspiciousness, or hatred and uncharitableness, then unless there come some irresistible force of God's grace upon which we have no right to count, that character will be perpetuated. We shall be just the same men and women beyond the grave, that we are while yet spared here. If we have not committed our souls to the Saviour here, and by God's grace gained some measure of holiness here, it will not set us right merely to die.

It would do us great good, it would make us feel the awful reality and responsibility of our short lives here, it would sweep away vain hopes that can tend only to delusion and destruction; if we could just feel *that!* That not even God's mighty power can make us happy in heaven if we do not grow fit for heaven: and that heaven and hell consist essentially in the perpetuation and completion of the moral and

spiritual character we attain on earth. We must get, here, the holy character which will fit us for that holy place, or we never shall enter it at all. Even if without holiness any man could see God, *that* would do him no good. A quite worldly and godless soul, not united to Christ and washed in His blood, not renewed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, would be just as far from being happy in heaven as anywhere else. Indeed, the bitter sense of being where it had no business to be, the bitter sense of being quite out of keeping and sympathy with the place, the inhabitants, and the employments, would make such a soul perhaps more miserable there than anywhere else. To sum up: there is a certain character of mind, a certain state of the heart and its desires and affections, without which we could not be happy in heaven. That state is called holiness. And so, in the very nature of things it is, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

Now, passing from this: taking for granted that we are all persuaded of it; and that we are really trying every day to put down diligently the manifold sorrowful manifestations there would naturally be of the bad tendencies that are in us all, even yet, after all we have known of God's grace and Spirit: taking for granted that we are (at the very least) wishing and praying to be separate from sin, to be separate from it in liking as well as in life—to *dislike*

what is wrong, not to feel we should be glad if it were right, and so open to us,—for surely *that* is the very least thing that can be called holiness: taking all this for granted, let me suggest to you one or two thoughts, that you may consider whether there be in your daily experience of your poor endeavours to grow and live holy, some things which have been in the experience of some among your fellow-pilgrims in the better way. For, though to say it may sound paradoxical, it is above all things cheering to compare disheartening experiences, and thus gain the assurance that we fare no worse than our brethren, faithful in Christ. One who is pressed with many troubles and discouragements in his worldly estate, gets some cheer as well as some counsel when he talks over things with a frank and true friend, in like manner tried. And even so is it in the realm of grace.

Now, the beginning of growing good is to leave off being bad. It is so, assuredly, for us, who start from the sorrowful fact of a fallen nature. "Cease to do evil, learn to do well," says God's Word, accurate as to the natural sequence. Then, my friends, when you are making the humble yet needful commencement of being holy, which consists in seeking that sin may be mortified and subdued within you, is it not very discouraging to find what a difficult work that is? It is disheartening and it is humbling to find, as you will often find, how terribly difficult it is to root out a natural evil tendency; and how, after you

fancied you had finally got the mastery over some besetting sin, by many efforts and many prayers, some day the sudden temptation comes, and you fall into transgression, in speech, or temper, or act, as in old wretched days of which you are deeply ashamed, and which you thought would never come back any more. And in that hour of discouragement you will think that, after all is said, your own faults are never cured. You will think that after all prayers for a new heart, all talk about a new creature, the old bad nature in us is still there, not subdued at all. The truth is, things are not so bad as that; but the work of subduing the old nature is a work that is never done—never done in this life. We have for a while repressed the manifestations of some evil inward bent, —held these outward manifestations and outbreaks of it in check, which make us miserable and ashamed, and degrade us before our fellows and before God; but when the tight curb is taken off, when the *watch and pray* are forgotten for a little, when there comes greater than ordinary pressure of temptation, still we find the old foolishness and badness in our heart, and they break out as long ago. What can we say in the presence of all this—not to palliate sin, not to excuse carelessness, but only to keep off despair—but that it seems God's plain purpose that all life to the last should be a warfare. Not the most advanced believer is to be allowed to sit down at spiritual ease, and quite cease to be on his guard against spiritual

foes. The day will never dawn upon any of us in this world, on which the old watchfulness, the old weary fight against temptation, must not be kept up, if we would not go far astray. It would be heaven, to be quite free from sin, and the risk of falling into grievous sin, and the poor, unworthy, disquieting, humbling tendencies to sin that are in our own natures. And if there be anything we are sure of, it is that, save for one here and there, blessed above men and women, heaven cannot even begin on earth. If the land Beulah be found on earth at all, it is, as in the matchless allegory, on its farthest confine, where nothing parts from the Golden City but the dark river of death.

Let us bear, then, with one another in faults and foibles; let us not expect too much from any; let us not be greatly disappointed if we find sad flaws in the best; let us not be hasty to doubt that Christian character which (right in the main) has yet its grievous inconsistencies. God bears with such; and well may we. And though taken down from vain conceit and vain confidence by our own failures, sins, and follies, we shall not (God helping us) be too much disheartened. This humbling have all His saints; and doubtless they need it all.

Then, beyond this, do not times come, times marked in some way,—communions, anniversaries, seasons of illness and sorrow,—in which you look round and

look in, and feel you have gone back, and fallen off? You live less than you used to do under the influence of Christian principle; there is a lower spiritual tone—I do not suppose anything worse than that—but there is a languor and *malaise* of soul, a lowering of devout and happy feeling; there is not the old delight in God's worship, public or secret; nor the entire resignation to God's will that once seemed to have been reached; nor the pervading thankfulness and cheerfulness of faith, and kindly sympathy and helpfulness towards all. Now, in such times, are you not made to feel how much you depend (under God's grace) upon others? How much your spiritual tone and temper, your better life, depend upon the aid you get from others, and the moral atmosphere that breathes from others? It is strange that this is allowed to be. Yet it is most certain. How much may depend upon the preacher you hear habitually; the line of reading you get into; the nature of the services of the church where you worship! No doubt, when one has heard a truly great preacher,—a truly good and devout man of rare ability,—not a preacher who makes us think how great he is, or how eloquent, or how thoughtful, but who makes us feel the awful realities of which he speaks, and which involve himself as well as you,—one has thought what unspeakable spiritual advantage that man's congregation has; what life, heart, reality, he puts into his instruction; what good (under God) he must do! But you cannot get a very great or a

very good man for every parish in the country,—and probably a very good man is as rare as a very great one; and do not we all know, from bitter experience, that there are preachers who deaden and refrigerate, and irritate by utter incapacity and lifelessness; to hear whom preach is a miserable penance, and exactly the opposite of a means of grace; who through a long succession of dreary wretched Sundays preach their congregation down to their own level? Now, at what an awful spiritual disadvantage a young soul grows up under a twice dead ministry like that! And on the other side, the preacher, too, feels keenly and deeply the influence of the congregation: either lifting up or weighing down, warming or chilling, stimulating or unnerving, raising him above himself or lowering him below himself: What a mutual help or hindrance may that relation be! And what a difference it is to all, when God's house is a place with a glow of spiritual life about it,—where you go and get lifted up, and inspirited, and helped on your way; or a chilly, lifeless place, that does you harm every time you enter it,—a stumbling-block and temptation to sin instead of a means of grace and salvation! And feeling, as each of us must feel, how dependent our better life is on these things, let us pray earnestly that by God's kind mercy we may be allowed, as long as we live, to have them at least fairly favourable. We dare not think what we might come to be, if we were placed as some Christians have been placed: how what we

trust is the life of grace in us might dwindle, flicker, and die!

Do you say it is a poor sign of our spiritual health to need to be kept thus alive by people and things and influences beyond ourselves? As well say that it is a poor sign of our bodily health that we cannot go into a fever hospital without running the risk of catching fever; that we cannot live if we have not our necessary food! Yes, we *are* weak creatures, and dependent, needing all the protection and help we can get, both in the realm of grace and the realm of Providence. We cannot all fix for ourselves the bounds of our habitation: The great Disposer above may say to us, Go here or go there. But where spiritual life is flourishing, it is a great risk to change our surroundings; to do that may bring us down or throw us back far. "Choose Christ," said a great preacher of other days to his flock, when saying farewell to them; "Choose Christ: Why should the shifting of human instruments so discourage you when He is your willing friend?" That was all well to say: but when he went from those whom he helped to choose Christ; when each Sunday no longer brought the warm push in the right direction, the strong keeping-up to the right frame, but the dreary setting-out of dead things in the old dead way; what an awful loss there would be, for all prayers and all endeavours! Now, if we have helps, things forwarding our better life, let us be thankful for them, and diligent in the use of them.

If hindrances, how much we need the Holy Spirit: God send Him mightily! It always struck one as inexpressibly touching when certain rough but honest souls, brought to Christ by a wise and kind Christian philanthropist, being called far away to danger, spiritual more than bodily, entreated that good friend to come with them and keep them straight: surely simplicity and wisdom were in that request together. The conversation and influence of even one friend: what a spiritual help they may be! Let us not allow any earthly gain to lead us into spiritual risk. We would not willingly go to a climate, however soft its breezes, that is fatal to bodily health; that would abridge our life, and debilitate our usefulness. No more should we, unless absolutely sent by God's providence, go into a moral atmosphere in which holiness and spirituality must droop, and perhaps may die.

There are many things more one would wish to say, but they cannot be said now. And it is sad to think that though you and I are impressed by these truths now, we may have mainly forgotten them to-morrow. If it be so with me, who wrote the sermon, much more with you who only heard it for half-an-hour. Would that our clearest convictions and best feelings were not so grievously transient! There is but the one thing to do. We have done it before, and failed after it: yet we can but do it again. Let us pray, solemnly pray, that our hearts be filled with

the Holy Spirit. For so, only so, shall we, who have put our hand to the plough, never look back. So only, having seen what to do, shall we go and do it. So only, knowing that without holiness no man shall see God, shall we grow holy, and thus meet in the end for the Beatific Vision!

XI.

WHAT-LIKE SHALL ENTER IN.

"Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God."—ST LUKE xviii. 16.

YOU all know, for every one knows *that*, how in the case of this world's great geniuses and great heroes, we feel a special interest in any account which may be conveyed to us by that vague social tradition which we call gossip, and which is not always a bad thing, of the gentler and more domestic features and incidents in their character and story. We like to turn away for a while from those grander occasions, on which they appeared before the world with all their great powers upon the stretch; and to follow them into their home retirement, and see them unbend from that tension, and descend from that elevation, and appear before us as beings like ourselves, with like feelings, affections, and weaknesses. We are not so pleasantly impressed with the character of a renowned Grecian monarch, when we mark his wisdom on the throne and his prowess on the battlefield, as when we see him sporting with his

children by the fireside of his home. We should not have cared so much about a famous Roman emperor, had we known of him only as swaying that proud sceptre, as when we see him laying all that grandeur aside; descending by his own free choice from the throne of the world; busying himself in the culture of his little garden, and all interest about its flowers and fruits.

You will be prepared for my saying that I think we have, in the little incident recorded in these verses, one of those touching and beautiful features in our Saviour's character, which do so much to endear it to our heart. There is something here that brings His Godhead to the level of our sympathy. We are awed when we think how within the human form of Jesus Christ, there dwelt the wisdom and the power of God. We look on, in humble fear, not understanding though believing, as we see Him do so easily those miracles: yet if it were only such things as these that we knew about that Blessed One, we should rather shrink from Him in fear, than go to Him in trust and love. But when we see the great Redeemer shedding human tears: when we picture Christ to our minds sitting with a little child upon His knee: then it is that our heart goes forth to Him: then it is we feel that here indeed is Emmanuel, God with us. We could not spare from the gospel story such things as these. We do not reverence our Lord the less for them, but we love

and trust Him more. They come in, amid all the sublimities and mysteries of the Redeemer's life, like a green, sunny islet amid the solemn stretches of the Atlantic; or like a pleasant shady valley, embosomed amid stern Alpine steeps and snows.

There was a departed day, on which little children were brought to our Blessed Saviour, that He might put His hands upon them and bless them. His disciples found fault with this: they thought, it seems, that it was needlessly troubling the Master: and they rebuked the people who brought the children to Him. But our Saviour Himself had a very different feeling. He disapproved this interference, though doubtless well meant. He called those little ones to Him, with words which will not pass from the memory and heart of our race till heaven and earth pass away: "Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." And I ask you specially to attend to the reason He assigned, why He so liked to have those smooth little faces and those unworn voices by Him: "For of such is the kingdom of God." That word, which bears divers meanings in the New Testament, here doubtless signifies the Church of the Redeemed on earth, and likewise that purer and better communion, the assembly of the Blest in heaven. Now, taking the phrase in this latter sense, it casts a significant meaning, it casts a touching meaning, on the saying of the Redeemer. In His

days of humiliation, of exile from His home above,—in the midst of a world of sin and sorrow,—He looks upon those innocent little creatures gathered round Him: He says He likes to have them near Him, and He gives the reason why: "*For* of such is the kingdom of God." They reminded Him of the place He came from: they did so as world-hardened men never could. Such as this was the society He was used to, before He entered upon this painful life. "Of such," such-like, "is the kingdom of God:" and as the Redeemer looked earnestly upon those innocent faces, what remembrances would arise of the glory whence He came; what pictures would be before His mind's eye; what music in His ear! They came back, all: as these fresh leaves and first blossoms round us to-day recall the voices of our parents dead, and the home of our childhood: as a snatch of long-forgotten music recalls to the exile the hills of his native land.

It is to this latter part of the verse that I wish now to ask your attention for a little while. It will give us plenty to think of; and without taking up time in showing the adaptation of the previous words to the requirements of the present age, or in pointing out to you how we fulfil our Saviour's injunction by training up the young in His knowledge and faith and fear, let us try to fix the sense in which He said, speaking of little children, that "of such is the kingdom of God."

Now, it will suggest itself at once, that one sense in which this is true, is, that the great company of those who are indeed the Saviour's people, is made up of those who resemble little children in certain distinctive features of their character. You know that in several texts of Scripture this truth is told. In a verse which comes immediately after my text, Christ says, "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein." And in St Matthew's Gospel our Saviour is recorded to have declared, even more strongly, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." "Whosoever," He adds, "shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Taking these and the like passages of holy writ as lights to guide us to the understanding of the text, it seems certain that one thought, perhaps the main thought, which was present to the Redeemer's mind when He said of little children that "of such is the kingdom of God," was that the Church of Christ, the Church militant, and far more the Church triumphant, consists of such-like as these unsophisticated ones, fresh from God, who is our Home;—their birth, perhaps, for what we know, a sleep and a forgetting;—and the heaven they came from still around them in their infancy, as a poet of the purest inspiration has sung: such-like in temper, in disposition, in character. Of all things you could point to in this world, the thing

that would give you the best idea of the essential spirit that is most Christ-like, is the spirit of an innocent and happy little child. Like teachable, like humble, like gentle, like affectionate, like confiding,—should all true Christians be. I need not tell you that it is only in a general way that the comparison holds; and that we must not push it too far. We are not to understand that even the comparative innocence of earliest childhood can fully represent the perfect purity of the redeemed and sanctified souls above. You know that human beings are sinners from the cradle: that we come into this world with the sad heritage of a fallen nature,—and that perfect innocence is a thing which on this earth *cannot be.* But the general sense which the text conveys is plain to the candid mind: we are to understand that believing people in this world ought to be distinguished by features of character resembling the best and purest which infancy and childhood present; and also that the nearest approach which in this state of being we can find to the stainless purity of the happy spirits above, we find in the confiding, loving, humble, teachable, unambitious temper of a little child. All that perfect trust in a parent's care and love: all that gush of affection ever ready to well out upon the dear ones to whom birth and blood have bound it: all that ready sympathy with the poor sufferer: all that freshness and fulness of heart yet unseared and undeadened by the world: the unsuspicious artlessness: all these winning features which are so engaging and

lovely in the little child,—are the very traits and characteristics which should mark the kindly Christian man and woman. And even worldly genius has told you how beautiful it is, to see something yet of the child's warm heart in the man with hoary hairs: something of the unspoiled freshness of infancy, and its home-bred simplicity, abiding still with one who has seen the great world, and borne an honoured part in its conflicts and toils: one of those who, as St Paul would have it, in malice are children, but in understanding are men.

So far for one sense in which the text says truth: but there is another, which may well be cherished by most of our firesides. I believe that we may take these words of our Saviour in their literal meaning, as implying that the kingdom of God, the assembly of redeemed souls in heaven, is in great measure made up of little children. When Christ pointed to those innocent little things that were brought to Him, and said "Of such is the kingdom of God," may not His words be taken as reminding us that a great part,—some would say a great majority,—of heaven's population, is made up of those who never were more than children here? All that die in infancy are saved: and half the human beings born into this world die in infancy. Fifty out of every hundred souls that come to this earth, pass away from it before they knew sin, before they could reject the Saviour.

All infants, I repeat, are saved: and half the world's population dies in infancy. If the entire human race should be gathered, sanctified and forgiven, before the Throne above, still each second one there would never have known more of this sinful and sorrowful world than comes within the brief experience of early childhood. And are we not reconciled to this: are we not humbly content: is it not well with the child laid in the little grave: when we think how godless are very many that grow up to mature years? I said that fifty of each hundred that are born, pass unstained by sin, and find abundant entrance into heaven: what comes of the other fifty? What kind of life are some of them living: what sort of end does it forecast? I do not speak of the numbers in our own land, who are sunk in the lowest depths of sin and misery: I do not speak of the hundreds of thousands, who, within hearing of the church-going bell, are living a heathen life, scarcely lifted above that of the lower animals: but think how little sign many who bear the Christian name give that they have in them the feeblest spark of the Christian life! I do not believe that they are "few that be saved:" they are "a multitude which no man can number:" but in desponding moods one sometimes has thought that the Better World would be poorly peopled, if there were none There but such as lived long here. But though we come to be hopeful, humbly thinking of God's knowledge of the weak-

ness and waywardness of His poor creatures, and of the all-sufficiency of Christ's great Sacrifice, yet it is pleasant to be sure that numbers without number, who never sinned, are gathered There. Oh, pleasant to think that from the heathen's palm-covered shed, where the little one, if he had lived to be a man, would never have heard of Jesus: and from the foul den in the civilised city, where the little one, if he had lived to be a man, would have been trained to every wickedness from the very dawn of understanding: yes, and from the home of wealth and rank, where the little one, if he had lived to be a man, might have forgotten the God that made him, and run the wild career of vice and shame: pleasant surely to think that from all these influences which might have ruined the immortal soul of the man, the little child was saved:—that from all these scenes, from feverish pillows, from cold and hunger and wan pinched faces and cruel blows, pure young souls winged their early flight to the better "kingdom of God:" that "God took them in His mercy, as lambs untasked, untried: *He* fought the fight for them: *He* won the victory: And they are sanctified!"

There are not many homes where this blessed truth is not welcome: not many parents who have not seen the little eyes close upon this world, and the busy hands at rest. Then bless God for one of your family safe for ever. My friends, if your children grow up, however good they may be, however great

a comfort and pride to you, you come down now to the "good hope through grace:" the full assurance of glory is for the little one that died. If it had been spared, never in all its life after would it have been so sure of heaven. And it might,—God only knows,—have been your heart-break: it might have turned aside to perdition, amid the temptations of this wicked world. You dare not say that the most flourishing professor of religion is quite raised above all risk of falling: Here we can never cease to watch and pray, if we would keep right. Every week we hear sad proofs of the frailty of human nature: we find those who long kept all the appearance of being true Christians, proving by some shameful deed that their religion was a pretence: not the less a pretence because it may have imposed upon themselves. The sentiment was sound as well as touching, of a graceful Christian poet and minister who lately died,* —who, many years since, in the midst of his grief at the heavy stroke which took away the youngest of three little sons, could yet say sincerely that he would rather lose the other two, than see *him* given back to life. The living children were good now, and the promise of their childhood fair: but God only knew how temptation might prevail against them as years went by. "It may be that the Tempter's wiles *their* souls from bliss may sever: But if our own poor faith fail not, *he* must be ours for ever." *That* one

* Mr Moultrie of Rugby.

was safe: where there is no possibility of sin nor danger: where time, as it goes onward, works no sad change.

And now, my brethren, let each of us think what an awful responsibility it is to have lived to years of understanding. There once was a time, when if it had pleased God that you and I had died, we had been sure of heaven. But we have got beyond that stage. We have lived to know good from evil: we have lived to feel their warring powers at conflict in our own hearts: we have heard the gospel of Christ, and know of an atoning sacrifice and a helping Spirit: we have been tempted many times to do wrong: we have sometimes yielded to temptation and sometimes resisted it: we are entered as soldiers in the solemn battle of life: we must either overcome or be vanquished: we must choose Christ for our portion, or choose the world: we have passed beyond the line up to which our eternal fate was out of our own hands: we have reached the season in our being here, at which, in a certain sense, a most real sense, that tremendous responsibility is cast upon ourselves: life and death are set before us, and we are constrained of necessity to make our choice between the two. And just to make no choice at all, but to go where the current takes us, is to choose death. So it is, that each of us, by coming to years, has run the risk of perdition. There are two risks,

two great uncertainties, in the life of every one of us. There is the first uncertainty, Shall we ever come to be, or to seem, Christian people at all? There are those who appear to go through life without a vestige of spiritual character or experience. There is the next uncertainty: Even after a human being (so far as man can say) has believed in Christ and gained somewhat of the grace of the Holy Spirit,—shall the good profession be held fast to the end? There have been those who made a most hopeful beginning,—who bade fair for glory,—but fell quite away. And though it be true that once united to Christ, is united to Christ for ever: though it be true that temptation can never finally prevail against those who are truly regenerated and sanctified: still remember that we cannot open the Book of Life, and see if our names are written there: and vain indeed is any assurance of salvation arising from what we have felt within ourselves, if failing grace and chilling devotion in our present life give it the lie. It is only if in fact we are persevering, that we have any reason at all to think that we are of the number of those saints who are appointed to persevere to the end. If we are falling away, that high doctrine is anything but a comforting one: It only tells us that if we end wrong, we never were right: we can build no hope on past experience. Who should be so watchful, who so prayerful, as those who believe *that?* What solemn reason we all have, on many days, to stand

in doubt and fear of ourselves: knowing how world-worn, how cold and indevout we are; and remembering times when surely it was better with us!

But though these things be true, and though our Saviour bids us watch and pray, it is not His will that any of His children be overwhelmed with anxiety for what is coming, either in Providence or in Grace. If we trust in Him, and do our own best, He will provide: He will bear us through. All His ways are right: and we acquiesce with humble submission in that divine decree, which appointed that you and I should go forth to bear the burden and heat of life's little day, and to share in the turmoil and strife of life's ceaseless battle: instead of being, as we might have been, rapt away while we were little children yet; and spared all that toil and temptation and pain; and taken to the full and passionless rest in that happy place whose population gathers within it untold millions, who never knew in this world more of the mortal life, than comes within the brief experience of early childhood. I suppose that most of us have outgrown ambition, whether temporal or spiritual: Rest, and purity, and safety, are our main desire: the lowliest place in heaven will do; and it suffices that we be numbered among "the least of all saints." Yet let those remember who would be stimulated by the remembrance, that the highest and happiest places where all are high and happy, are promised to those who fight their way to heaven in the face of

temptation and opposition, as all save those who pass in infancy must. It is to "him that overcometh," that Christ has promised the best things: promised them over and over. Little do we understand His words: but they fall on our ear like music that means much, and tells it sweetly:

"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My Throne."

Not in His Throne, but at His pierced feet, it will suffice abundantly if we are suffered to sit down!

XII.

CONTENTMENT.

"For I have learned, in whatsover state I am, therewith to be content."—PHILIPP. iv. 11.

A VERY eminent preacher, preaching the other day before a scientific association, is reported to have declared, broadly, that the great purpose of Religion is not to prepare human beings for entering into another world, but rather to fit them for their work in this world. I think it wiser to put aside such a comparison; and to say (which is beyond question true) that the Christian religion does not merely provide for our happiness in the world beyond the grave; it provides also for our peace on the way thither. And thinking of this last, we may well give some thought to the pleasantly-sounding text in which the great Apostle Paul tells us the temper in which he had come to look upon all worldly matters. "I have learned," he says, "in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

He had *learned* it, he tells us: and this seems to imply that it had taken him some time to come to it.

He had *learned* it; and the way in which he speaks seems to imply that it had not been a very easy lesson, and that at one time in his life he had been inclined to be of a very different way of thinking. I suppose that once St Paul was like most of us,—apt to murmur and complain at the cross-events and troubles of this life; apt to think less of the many things God gives than of the few things God denies; apt to forget how many things go right with us, thinking of the lesser number that go wrong. I suppose St Paul was once like many men; conceited enough to think he deserved something better than he had got: readier to think of the comparatively few who are better off, than of the far greater number who are worse off. But St Paul tells us in the text, that as he had grown older, he had grown wiser: that when he thought longer on the matter, he had come to think very differently from what he had done at first: that the result of all his experience of life had been to make him conclude that things after all were better in God's hands than they would have been in his: that perhaps God knew better than he did who ought to be rich and who ought to be poor: that perhaps after all it was just as well that hunger and cold and nakedness should have been his appointed lot, while others were clad in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. And even if he were not able quite to see the Why and Wherefore of all God's arrangements as to his own lot, and as to the lot of others; still when he came

to know God better, he had such perfect confidence in God's kindness and wisdom, that he could not even wish for one minute that things should have turned out otherwise than as his Saviour had decreed. And so, as he looked round him, upon his poor earthly lot: Paul the captive now, Paul the aged, Paul the lonely man, with no pleasant family-circle to surround his fire-side, Paul who had known such perils, such labours, such sufferings,—scourgings, buffetings and contempt, —he tells us that now by God's good grace he had been brought to this, that he could put up with even worse things than these; yea, that he had "learned, in *whatsoever* state he was, therewith to be content!"

Now perhaps there is not one of us here who is not as free from worldly hardships as St Paul was: and surely if that great and good man managed to be content in his poor lot, we may well seek to be so in ours. The same grace that taught him, and helped him, is ready to teach and help us. And when we remember how besetting a sin discontent is: when we think what a faithless, ungrateful, undutiful thing towards our kind Father in heaven it is to be discontented: when we think how happy a Christian might be, with all his good hope for another world, if he could be heartily content with his lot in this: surely it will be good and right for once to turn our minds seriously to this subject, praying that God's Spirit may make all that shall be said about it profitable to every one here. I shall try to show you the reasons which may

have been present to St Paul's mind, tending to lead him to this way of thinking: all of them reasons which have lost no part of their force from the ages that have passed since St Paul felt them: all of them reasons which should lead us, too, to St Paul's conclusion.

I have not the least doubt that every one here would like to be contented with his place in life, if he could find the way to be so: because every one knows that to be contented is the way to be happy, in so far as God intends us to be happy here. A person who is always fretting and grumbling that things do not go as he wants, is not merely a most disagreeable neighbour and companion,—not merely a great plague to others, but an insufferable burden to himself. And I should be doing you a good turn, if (by God's help) I could shew you the way in which to put down the tendency to repine when it is beginning to arise; and to keep yourselves grateful and contented.

For one thing then, whenever we are disposed to repine at our worldly condition with its needful calculations and economies: to wish for a larger income and more ease and comfort, and to feel dissatisfied as we look round the plain little place we live in, and as we think of the many things we should like to get, but which we cannot afford: let us, at such a season of temptation to ungrateful murmuring, consider How much we should get if we got just what we deserve and no more. If God were to treat us as we

deserve to be treated, and to give us nothing more than we merit at His Hand,—do you think we should be as well off as we are? Do you think we should be half as well off? Do you think we should have any blessings left to us at all? Ah, my brethren, it would be running an awful risk if you were to say to the great Disposer, "I am ready to give up all I have at present, on condition that I be put in the position due to my merits, and that I get what I deserve." Why, when it comes to speaking in that fashion, What do we merit at the hand of God? Nothing that is good. Nothing you would wish to have. There is just one case in which a human being can take up the word *deserve* when he stands before God. There is one thing which even in the presence of the Almighty we can say we have a right to. "Every sin *deserveth* God's wrath and curse, both in this life, and that which is to come." *There* is what man can stand before God, and talk about deserving. But when it comes to anything good, to anything we would wish to have, then we deserve nothing. It is in the very nature of the case *impossible* that we can deserve anything. Everything we have and hope for, we receive of God's free and undeserved goodness: everything from the least to the greatest: everything from the breath of air we draw and never think of it, up to the providential deliverance from threatened death that brings us to our knees with tears of gratitude: yea, up to the last unspeakable gift of a

Saviour to redeem us and a Blessed Spirit to sanctify. Even if all our life long we had never sinned, and so merited wrath: if all our life we had been faithful and constant in God's service: we should even then be forward to confess that we were "unprofitable servants," who had simply "done what it was our duty to do:" that in all our doing, we did but pay a just debt: for "all things come of God, and of His own we had given Him." But there is no need to take that somewhat austere ground. Little matters to us that high truth. For when we remember how sadly short we have come of doing for God what we feel we could have done: when we look back, each of us, over a life of foolishness, short-coming, and transgression, wherein whatever else we see, our sin is ever before us, and which bows us down with shame and sorrow: when we think how we have slighted Christ's mercy and grieved His Spirit: does it not sometimes seem a wonder that the sun shines on us unthankful and evil, and the earth yields her nourishment: yea, that we are still spared in the place of hope: well may we be humbly thankful that of God's great mercy we are suffered to abide where salvation through Christ is offered us, and the Holy Spirit is yet waiting to enable us to believe and live!

Secondly: whenever you are aware of the rising temptation to find fault with the place, and the circumstances in life, in which God has set you,—then think how much more favoured you are than multi-

tudes of your fellow-creatures. There is hardly a soul here who is not in at least as good and tolerable a condition as five out of every ten of all the individuals who make up the human race. And though some were poorer than they are, there are thousands and thousands poorer by far: though some, heavily tried with suffering in body and soul, had suffered yet more heavily, there are many men and women to whom far worse has been sent. Who made us to differ from the very forlorn-hope of poor humanity? There is many and many a better man than we, who would this day thank God to be placed just where we are. It is very awful to read authentic accounts of dark places on this earth, of dark years that have dragged over many places on this earth: wherein one wonders how poor miserable fellow-creatures of ours could live at all. Think of central Africa: Think of the Thirty Years' War: Think of the hellish deeds of the French Revolution: Think of frightful recesses in London, in Edinburgh, of unspeakable misery, and sin the outcome of misery: and then thank God that He has in His mercy set us where we are! It is a pitiable thing, a thing with which it is hard to have any patience, the way in which we sometimes hear people talking; complaining and grumbling that they are not placed in circumstances in which not one person in ten thousand in this world possibly *can* be placed: though if they would just think for a minute they could hardly help seeing that they have not the shadow of a claim

to these prizes in the allotment of life. I declare I have heard human creatures complain more bitterly because they could not keep a carriage, than others when they could hardly find bread. And it is ever the most useless and helpless members of society whom we find thus coolly proposing that they should be lifted above the heads of people in general, and quite discontented that they are not. When I hear any person expressing his or her dissatisfaction at not being so placed that they should never have to deny themselves any wish or whim because they could not afford it; one cannot help thinking, Well, what earthly right have you to expect to be petted by Providence in that fashion? You know, surely, that ninety-nine in every hundred human beings are placed in no such way; and why on earth should *you* be singled out and thus favoured? I do not scruple to say that this far from uncommon discontent implies in the person who feels it either silliness verging on idiocy, or self-conceit verging on that. In this world of real privation, and real pain, one does well to be angry here. Let such cease from that insolent and hateful prattle; and thank God that He has made them to differ from the lowliest of their fellow-mortals, each one of whom deserves as much as they!

Thirdly: whenever you are disposed to murmur and complain of your lot, think Who it was that put you in it. It is hard to think that any Christian person would give way to the feeling of discontent, if he were

really to remember, as it begins to rise up within, that God placed him in life: that God has judged *that* the right place for him: that God measures out his daily comforts and sends his daily cares. If we are true Christians, we know that God has promised to make all things work together for our good: we are sure that the way by which He leads us is ever the right way: and we may be quite sure that the lot in which we are, if not the very best that could be for our spiritual welfare, is at the least one in which we may abide with God, and grow in grace, and ripen for glory. I do not mean to say that it is any comfort to the man who has not found and does not want any part in Christ to remember that God orders his worldly circumstances; for such a man (whatever he may hope) has no promise that God will care what comes of him: but it is very different with the humble Christian, who knows that the Sovereign Disposer of all things is his Father, and Friend. Think of His wisdom,—could you mend it? Think of His kindness,—can you doubt it? Think, He intended to put you in a place that would be truly good for you: surely He knew how to do what He intended! He does not always think as we think: but *then* we think wrong. He is right in all His ways: Well, when worries come, and greater trials, seek to really take it in and cling to it, that His sending you these is one of those ways of God which you know are right. If you be a true believer: if you have faithfully made the best of the worldly opportu-

nities God has given you: and if after doing your best you remain still in a lowly estate; then bear it in your heart that God placed you in your little humble home, as surely as He placed the Sun in the firmament: that He gave you your little cares to go through, as truly as He gave it its grand course to run. Dear friends, it is an undutiful thing for a Christian to be discontented. It is as much as if he said to God, I do not believe that you really love your people as you say you do: I do not believe that you are really seeking to make me happy here and hereafter as the New Testament says. It is to faithlessly doubt either God's love to wish us well; or else God's wisdom and power to do us the good He wishes. "Thy will be done," should be the utterance of our soul: and in dark days, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." You will not presume, surely, to say, that you know what is good for you better than God does. And you will never allow yourself to fancy that you are more anxious for your weal here and hereafter than Christ is. Be sure of this, for it is sure: that however humble, however unpromising your lot may seem, there must be something good about it, if you take it the right way: some virtue which faith and prayer may get at, and grace may thrive on. Christ would never have allowed you to be where you are, had that not been so.

Fourthly: I desire to suggest just one consideration more, which seems well fitted to check the first mur-

murs of discontent: God grant that we may feel it come home to us with a real power, for it is a bad account of us if it looks fanciful. Whenever you are disposed to repine that your condition is not a more favoured one, remember what was the condition in which your Saviour lived, when He dwelt among men. "The disciple is not above his Master": and if Jesus of Nazareth had not a home to put His head in: if He knew weariness and want, and accepted these, for reasons doubtless which were sufficient: surely thereby He hallowed the poverty to which He humbled Himself; and made it impossible that any Christian should wonder if some trials and troubles come his way. And however we may be ready, many times, to practically forget all this, I cannot think that with the remembrance of Christ's poor fare and weary feet distinctly brought up to us, there is one of us but would try hard and truly to be humbly resigned to whatsoever pain in body or soul God may in His wisdom send. There are unendurable sufferings, under which body and soul would faint, would madden: but God will not send these. Or if one, a rare one, here and there, should be appointed to the martyr's endurance, to that one the martyr's strength will assuredly be vouchsafed; and the crown of superhuman splendour and renown, kept only for those best of the Church and the Race who are reckoned in that noble army. We may be right well assured that now, in the eternal rest and glory, these supreme

and exceptional sufferers would not wish their sufferings had been less: The pain is past, and *they* have "learned to be content" many a year ago: *That* anguish has set some on high for ever, who but for it might scarce have entered in.

But going back from this, which it was impossible for me to help saying, and which some of you remember things in British story that will help you to understand,—let us take up the dropt thread, and instead of arguing out, through perilous details, the manner in which Christ's privations teach His children to be content under theirs, I shall content myself with quoting two verses of a very homely, and little known, but very real and earnest piece of religious verse, which its good writer no doubt thought was a hymn. And assuredly these verses may teach and admonish us; though they be short of our present standard of what would suit in praise:—

As much have I of worldly good,
 As e'er my Master had:
I diet on as dainty food,
 And am as richly clad,—
Though poor my garb, though scant my board,
As Mary's Son, and Nature's Lord.

The manger was His infant bed,
 His home the mountain-cave:
He had not where to lay His head,—
 He borrowed even His grave.
Earth yielded Him no resting-spot,—
Her Maker, but she knew Him not.

So *there*, my friends, I have tried to give you some

reasons why you and I should be content in the condition where God has placed us, whatever that may be. Surely the reasons are good: God give us grace to feel their weight. And we need take no extravagant ground. No one will say that you may not fairly and rightly do your best to mend your circumstances, and to rise to a better position than you hold now. Do your best by fair means to get on in life, only remembering that worldly gain is not always profit. Try to grow rich, only remembering that worldly wealth is not the best riches nor the surest provision. Nor need you blush to own, if your mind runs that way, that it would be pleasant could you so occupy your little entrusted talent, as that you should come to be kindly thought of by some who never saw nor knew you, and whom you will never see nor know. But should it please God to frustrate your toils, and to disappoint your wishes: should it please God to say you shall never be a wealthy man, and never an eminent man: You shall plod on through life by lowly ways, and lie down at length in a nameless grave: then bethink you how in the Valley of Humiliation there may be found the peacefullest walks of the Christian life;—and be well content, as better and worthier have been, to be ranked with "Nature's unambitious underwood, and flowers that prosper in the shade." And when you remember that to Christ's redeemed ones, this life is but the passage to glory, honour, and immortality,—

only the school-time in which to go through the training for the Home above,—it matters the less as to the fashion in which they shall go through the pilgrimage. If you were going a short journey, you would not be very anxious what kind of figure you made on the way: you would not mind much about astonishing your fellow-travellers: you would submit to little inconveniences with calmness; you would think that the pleasure of the journey, if it were pleasant, would soon be over; and its vexations, if there were vexations, would very quickly be past. Then pray for God's grace to feel in like manner towards the longer journey of life. Pray for that "godliness with contentment" which is "great gain": pray that you may indeed learn by heart this text's kindly and unambitious lesson. God order our lot, and fix the bounds of our habitation: only resign our will to His good will: making all our earthly journey the pilgrimage to rest, and all our earthly life the discipline for the heavenly Home!

XIII.

ON CHRISTMAS-DAY.*

"And they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."—ST MATT. i. 23.

ALL anniversaries tend to be disappointments: we cannot bring back the old time, nor the feeling of the old time. And few things more impress the human being on whom the greatness and the weariness of the way are telling, than the changed feeling with which his own returning birthday is welcomed,—if welcome be the word. The name has a different sound now. Once it was hopeful: the unknown yet bright possibilities of life were all before us. Now it is sad: sad in no sentimental sense, but with the dull leaden heaviness that comes through the ceaseless care and worry of advancing years. It is so too with the great Birthday which has come round again: *That* is not now what it used to be. The truth it recalls is the same, God be thanked: and we feel more than ever that we could not live without our Blessed Redeemer and the hopes that come through Him. But

* St Mary's Church, St Andrews: 1873.

some cannot but remember Christmasses that were very miserable. There is not much heart now for the rejoicing of the festive season: the *merry Christmas* is to many like a mocking word. Even the effort towards a gushing kindliness is apt to cause a revulsion through the sense of unreality. The great thought to which we cling is rather that He who was born to-day has opened for us a better country, where the disappointed hopes, the endless cares, will all be forgot.

Trouble hedges us in, more and more, going on through this life. The pleasantest voices some of us have ever heard in this world, we shall not hear in this world any more. The things we most desired and hoped for, we know now we shall never get. Many a one feels that his life has been a miserable mistake: if he had it to begin again, how different it would be! But there is nothing for it but to hold on to the end, and try to make the best. And the gathering clouds and fears and perplexities of the Future threaten that life shall be more trying and more weary, till heart and hand break down.

On this day in last year, I tried to speak of the kindly and hopeful associations of this sacred season. The theme, perhaps, was hackneyed, but to some it has a wonderful charm: and what was then said is within the reach of any who may desire to recall it. To-day I do not ask you to think of pleasant things which have been held as associated with Christmas-time: not of oaken halls and frosty moonlights and

quiet snow, of the yule-log and the mistletoe; but rather of the essential and blessed Fact which is at the core of all these genial surroundings,—the essential and blessed Fact that makes the drear December more beloved than the leafy June,—that Jesus Christ our Blessed Saviour was born as on this day.

Born to-day! Drawing into narrow bounds His Infinitude, God Almighty is all in that little Jewish Baby, on His Virgin Mother's knee. Beginning with a new start His life that never began, the Eternal God, who was from everlasting, has entered but an hour since upon the life of clay. Blessed and happy,—though God only knows how God can be happy,—He has entered through lowliness into that anxious and painful being in which all must suffer, but in which He was the Chief and Solitary Sufferer,—the Man of sorrows such as none else ever knew. It is all very strange. Very strange. And yet, though so strange, something like it had been imagined and desired by the yearnings of all humanity: some thought of Incarnation, of God manifest in the flesh, is vital to almost all religions: the Desire of all nations was an Emmanuel, God with us: Surely the unrecognised teaching and inspiration of the Blessed Spirit had lifted up poor humanity to that wonderful yet most true thought. And so God Almighty, Second Person in the Unity of the Holy Trinity, came to this world in the guise of a helpless Baby: traceless in His coming like other infants: helpless like other

infants: with the throbbing flesh of very humanity wrapped around His Godhead, with its hundred inlets to weariness and pain: and here He grew up into little boy, into youth, into man: bearing our nature through three-and-thirty years. Here was, of a truth, Emmanuel, God with us: Not above us, and far less against us, any more: sympathizing with us through having felt the same: knowing us by experience: not content as it were to look sharply down on the strange mechanism of thought and feeling that is within you and me from the far elevation of Godhead: Things and people must look very different from *That* point of view: but knowing it all through placing Himself in the midst of it: a High Priest touched with the feeling of our infirmities: like us in everything but that one thing in which we could not bear to think Him like us,—in our foolishness and sin. And ever since that first Christmas-time, when the celestial music swelled and faded above the darkling fields of Bethlehem, and the first mention of the Good-News that is now so old was carried by angelic lips to rustic ears, humble yet how favoured,—how much nearer to mankind has God seemed: how plainly we understand, in so far as we need to understand, the Unseen, Invisible, Eternal, Infinite Jehovah with Whom we have to do! Talk of God as inconceivable!- It is the bewilderment of a metaphysician! Homely, loving, human-like; like as a father, tenderer and truer than a mother; is the God we see and

know in the blessed human face of Jesus Christ, Divine always, human afresh every Christmas-day! Even to speak of Him as taking away our sins, as able to save us to the uttermost, grand truth though it be, seems above us and beyond us,—poor creatures who must oftentimes believe and trust where we cannot comprehend: But the Man Christ Jesus, Elder Brother of all who will come to Him; once a little Child, wrapped up warm and laid in the rude cradle, resting on a woman's knee and clasped to her gentle bosom; This is Emmanuel, God with us: To Whom be love, trust, faithfulness, glory and blessing, now and evermore.

It is very strange, indeed, to think, that if ever the weary longings of our hearts are to be satisfied, and if ever the dull gnawing cares are to be taken quite away, it will be all through that little Jewish child that tottered across the floor to the Blessed Virgin's outstretched arms; that slept smiling in the hallowed manger as on this day. Strange, and true, that like your little boy and girl that last night lay sleeping in the little bed, in the firm and true belief that the Christmas-morn would bring some pleasant gift brought by God's kind angels,—even such-like was Christ. The round smooth Face that was to wear that most glorious crown of thorns,—a human Mother bent over it, with the light shaded from its sleeping eyes. The little Hands that were to be the most beneficent that ever were in this world where are many kind hearts

and hands,—that for our advantage were to be nailed to the bitter Cross,—were the helpless Hands of a Baby, and grew gradually stronger and bigger as did yours and mine. There, in the cradle, lay the Saviour of the world, the Blessed Redeemer: the Desire of all nations: the Desire of millions and millions who never thought of Him nor heard His Name. For every human being that ever lived, who felt that this world would not do, and that he must have more to satisfy and to give rest, was blindly desiring Christ: was stretching vague hands through the darkness, after Him. He is the Thing that every mortal has always been seeking, longing for, toiling for, unknowing what It was he sought. Every old gray man, every buoyant youth, every deep-thinking philosopher, every bed-ridden sufferer, was concerned in the Infant that slept in the rude cradle in the Judean village: Who seems to sleep again there to-day. I cannot promise any peace or rest or satisfaction of soul in this world, unless in Him: that is, unless in transferring your soul's true interest from this life to the other, from the things seen to the things unseen. God help each of us, by His Spirit, to do that, really: to do it anew this blessed Christmas-day. Let those this day rejoice that can, before the heavy days come which are coming: But let all of us, under our burdens, fears, and sorrows, seek to turn to Him Who to-day became Human; and to cast upon Him all our sins and cares!

It is not here that these great and blessed truths have the outward recognition which has such charm for many: probably for all of us now within these walls. It is not here that the melodious bells from the gray and ivied church-tower break sweetly on the silence of the Christmas-eve, as the time draws near the Birth of Christ. Not here is the quaint Carol sung in the crisp frosty sunshine, to announce what is to every man the best of all good news. Not here is the universal Holiday: the forgetting of wrongs and offences: the sacred Thorn-tree blossoming to-day by perpetual miracle: the ancient Hall, with its warm gloom of oaken wall and roof, and the glory of its rich windows, wreathed with the green holly and the red berries which spoke to hearts that are dust of the crown of thorns and the precious drops that ensanguined it;—crowded with rejoicing guests, high and low mingled for the day that brought salvation alike to the cottage and the crown; each with Christmas kindness in the heart and Christmas thoughts in the memory: and all around the beautiful snow, pure as our Lord Himself, bending the hearty evergreens and the great pine-branches. Even the parish church must stand deserted and silent on the Birthday of Christ. The grimness and sourness of Puritanism have had too much power with those fallible men who designed the worship of our National Church, though we thank God we are returning in these days to some little of the old beauty of holiness: yet we meet here, a hand-

ful out of the great congregation, with imperfect rites to celebrate the day. But perhaps nowhere, unless in Fable-land or Dream-land, has the ideal Christmas ever dawned. It is all unsatisfying here: all disappointing: God meant *that*, we know. Strangers and pilgrims on the earth, we look for a Home, far away. But there is true rest in Him, whose Birthday we keep: rest for us, and those who have gone before us: the Communion of Saints, one in Christ Jesus: the Family in heaven and earth.

XIV.

A CHOICE WHICH MUST BE MADE.*

"See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil."—DEUT. xxx. 15.

IT is always well that a writer and his readers should understand each other, and that a preacher and his hearers should understand each other. And so I don't mind telling you, to begin, that though I am much honoured by the invitation to preach to you this evening, I have had a great deal of difficulty in thinking of a subject. If I had to preach to you each Sunday for six months, or even six weeks, I should easily find abundance to say to you: but when I am called to preach, just for once, to a congregation so special, and so interesting,—earnestly wishing to say what may do some of you good, and not to lose a chance,—how I wish I had a message given me for you by God's Spirit! Perhaps I have got it from Him: I have at any rate asked it: and I have been led to take a most general text, which may make you think of all

* Preached in the Chapel of Fettes College, Edinburgh, on the evening of Sunday, June 27, 1875.

the life you are living, day after day, at school and at home, in term and in holidays,—and think to what it all tends. It is all tending to something. You are growing, now, into what you will be as men; and what you will be as men you will most likely be for ever: You will carry with you into the other world the character you shall have formed here: and the bliss or woe of your life beyond the grave will be mainly the outcome of *that*. To be good, is to be happy here, so far as that may be: happy, you will find out, is not quite the word. But to be good, is to be perfectly happy hereafter: "He that is holy, let him be holy still;" *That* is what we call Heaven. Your life in the world we cannot now see will be an unbroken continuation of your life here in Fettes College: and you will be there, always, just what you are growing to be here.

Now, you don't quite believe this. I know you don't: for I could not have believed it when I was a boy. On a day, long gone, I went to the Distribution of Prizes in a great school at Glasgow. There was a Magistrate in the chair, and he read a long speech. The only thing I remember in it was his saying to the boys, "In a few years, you will be conducting the business of this city: you will be filling its pulpits: you will be its magistrates." I did not really believe it. It seemed one of those things that old people say to boys. Some of you know how Sidney, in his famous story, tells that in Arcadia you would find here and

there a shepherd-lad piping as if he would never grow old. But no boy takes in that he will ever grow old. You do not. If I said these thriving trees outside will be grand avenues when you are in your graves: these silvery chimes will be the same as they were this June evening when you come back, care-worn and gray, to bring your own boys here to school: you could not take it in. Yet it will be. And there is a truth in your feeling too. We do not grow older in spirit. "The boy hides, and is not gone." We grow gray, and lined. It is only a mask: the spirit-face behind the mask is that of a boy. Your grave and renowned Masters are just bigger school-boys. The other day I met an old College friend. He is a Judge now, and a very good one. We spoke of College days, thirty years since; and he said, "I don't feel any older." An aged lady of eighty told good Dr Guthrie that she did not feel old. It will not be so very different with you, till the last experience,—when all this about us shall fade away:—when we shall finally go away from this into another world: and we do not know what *that* is like, for no one comes back to tell.

Now, think of my text.

Moses said it first, to Israel. But that is what God says to each of us: to every one who has a conscience, a sense of Right and Wrong, and sense to see we ought to do right and shun wrong. I have heard a

great man call this the *Granite*, on which all other spiritual beliefs rest: and so it is. It is taken for granted, and built on as the foundation, in all God's Revelation: in all Christ's atoning Work: in all the Holy Spirit's operation. Christ wants a peculiar people, zealous of good works: That is the test. All the Old Testament, Law and Prophets, take that for the test. Of course, we know how the foundations go down into the ground, of Christian faith and doctrine. All right is done for Christ's cause and by His grace. But we must take something for granted, in a short sermon. We understand all that, as Christ and His hearers mutually understood it, without saying fully. Now, it is not that I take on myself to say this text to you. God is saying it to us all, Masters and boys, young and old together. It is a choice we must each make. Not, like the fabled one, for once: but day by day, continually. It is the resultant of all our life. God make each of us choose life and good, and turn away from death and evil!

The days are happily past when it was thought a fine and manly thing to be reckless and bad: when boys were ashamed of being good. Let us thank God for Dr Arnold; aye and for Tom Brown. *That* is all over. The bravest thing that boy or man can do, is to fight against all that is bad, in him and round him, by God's grace. Yes, all would heartily say to you, Choose good. The worst man on earth would not wish his boy to grow up such as he!

It has a wonderful power to keep us cheerful, if we are trying every day by God's help to do right, and to keep down what is bad in us: if we keep going to God, and asking Him to help our own best endeavours to put down in us the tendency to laziness, or ill-temper, or harsh speaking, or to anything unkind, untrue, or impure. And I tell you what you will find out as you grow older. This daily endeavour to be good, the New Testament would say holy, like Christ, will be a spring of interest which will never fail, when other interests fail with your failing self. You will never get tired of it. Here is a thing which if you honestly want to get you are sure to get. Here is a thing which if you get it will not disappoint you. That is not the way of mere worldly ends. Then, wrong-doing spoils the enjoyment of all simple pleasures;—which are the purest and most lasting. No bad fellow, boy or man, can be happy in looking at the hawthorn blossoms, or at green grass and green trees. His taste demands the cayenne of vice: God pity and mend him. Even to little things, carry out conscientious doing. To be strict and careful in all little duties means that twenty times a day you are ranging yourself in the great fight of the universe, the fight between Right and Wrong: in which even a hopeless sceptical philosopher who lately died saw Right is visibly gaining, and must conquer at the last. To do wrong, even in little things, is to knock your head against the Universe. You will have constant little pangs of vague

remorse: you will have the pervading sense that you are out of gear and bearing with all right things. You may not see it as yet, but you will find it out, Sin is the thing God hates: and it cannot prosper in the long-run. There is that on it which will blast it. But as for Duty: going and toiling at tasks when you would rather not: practising self-denial: thinking of them at home when some temptation comes and daffing it aside: in brief, as for Right faithfully done; remember what was said by Wordsworth:

> "Stern Lawgiver! Yet thou dost wear
> The Godhead's most benignant grace:
> Nor know we anything so fair
> As is the smile upon thy face!"

I want to say a word here. When you go wrong, and do wrong, as you often will,—Make a new beginning! Forget past failures and errors: no worthy person will remind you of them; and strive after a new and better way, by God's help. The New Testament calls this repentance: and we must all be repenting, many times. Make a fresh start. Take warning from the past: but don't let it hang round your neck, crushing you down. Never you think you have got into such a mess that you can't be worse. Judas might have done better than hang himself. Go and tell your Master: tell your father or mother: and you will wonder how things will be put straight, and you have another chance. The things that finally

ruin men or boys are done *after* they have concluded that the case is desperate.

A man once said, when things looked bad for the country,—"Ah well, it will last my time." He was a King, but he was a miserable contemptible wretch all the same. Even to plant a tree that will be growing after you are dead, has in it something ennobling. To all men, but the basest, it is of profound interest what the boys and girls now growing up, who are to form the next generation, shall be. And people who have children of their own do not live very long till the interest of this life is all in their children. Their own career, they feel, is sadly blotted, with blots which will never quite go out: They have taken a wrong turning at some critical time,—got into a wrong line, and can never come right. We are hopeful, sometimes, that all our errors will be avoided in the fresh experiment of a new life: anxious, often, how it is to fare with our boys and girls when we are far away. We think of them grown-up, anxious, gray: What-like will they be, and where? What will you have made of life, you boys, in thirty years? It will be made or marred long before then. Then, if you are in this world, you will be mainly reaping what you have sowed: and thinking now and then of your father and mother, who are gone. God knows how your fortune may vary. "He putteth down one and setteth up another." It is chiefly a matter of Luck,—

which means God's Providence: and its decisions are very arbitrary and strange. No one can say which of you is to get on best. But you MUST make a good thing of life, if you choose good. You MUST end well. If you grow here fit for a better Place, pure, kind, magnanimous, hard-working, unselfish,—you will not be a failure. That cannot be.

It is not for yourselves only, either here or hereafter, that God bids you choose good. You have got in your keeping, remember, the worldly peace of your parents. It depends on *you* whether your Mother shall bustle cheerfully about her home-duties, always with Fettes College in the back-ground of her memory; or feel she has no heart for them and may just sit down and give up. It depends on *you* whether your Father shall bravely face the world and do good work in it; or plod heavily on, with little spring within, and break down early. You will do what you can to make their life bright, whose life is bound up in yours. Then, you are proud of your School: Make it some day proud of you. In the Library of the University of the ancient and famous city over which I am set, there are two words written in great letters on the wall: two words many of you have read in Homer. They are αιεν αριστευειν! They have stimulated many. One St Andrews student used to say they made him Lord Chancellor of Great Britain. And they point to a career which is open to every one of you, in that

moral and spiritual sense which is the highest and deepest sense of all. Not every one of you has in him the makings of a great lawyer, or artist, or scientist, or soldier, or divine. Not every one of you has in him the makings of mathematician or scholar. God gives us diversity of gifts; and the world is the richer for it. Some of you may be appointed to wear the ermine of the Judge, or the lawn of the Bishop: some to cultivate the wilderness, and carry the bravery and energy of the foremost race of mankind to the ends of the earth. But one thing you may all do: You may live a noble, pure, unselfish life; and do good to some. You may stand by God and good against death and evil. Life is before you: and here is the very best you can do in it: avoiding all our errors, gaining by our experience, dearly-bought with many a stumble: delivered, if it be God's will, from our cares.

You are helped by all the surroundings of your school-life here. Your discipline should go to ennoble you. You do not want here the vulgar puffery common in talking of inferior Schools, and degrading to all concerned: the man who utters it knowing that it is not true, and that it is believed by no one. Your Masters do not need that: and I would not insult you or them by it. Your teaching, of course, is the best: What-like men your teachers are, goes without saying. But what I prize here;—what may be got here by boys whose strength will never lie in pure scholarship;—is

that tone of honour, truth, and manliness, which pervades this College, and is its moral atmosphere. You breathe it and live in it; and it is a priceless thing. The shuffling trickster would not be stood here; nor the mischief-making tale-bearer; nor the cowardly bully, the meanest vermin that crawls. Be thankful for it; and make the best of your manifold advantages in this beautiful place, that withdraws within these green slopes, and looks from its height upon that fair Queen of Cities.

I have known, in my life, several great men: great in divers ways, but in the true sense. I have also known two or three heroes. I will tell you about one of these last. I call him a hero, because as truly as ever St Paul did, he fought a good fight, and finished his course, and kept the faith. He was a poor little deformed boy, who lived in a dark room alone with his old grandmother. He was really about sixteen, but he looked about eight. I never forget the thin pale good cheerful face, and the mis-shapen little figure. He came of a bad set, and had been sorely neglected: but he chose good, and lived a brave honest life under his sad disability, mainly supporting himself, and helpful to the poor old woman: he chose good, when everything about him might have led to evil. He was taken ill at last, of a very painful trouble: but he was always patient and never complained, even when he could hardly get breath, and had to kneel for the last

days of his life, because he could not sit or lie down. If ever I was glad in my life, it was when I knew that my name was all but the last word on the lips of that little soldier of Christ when he died. Thinking of him, I recall what Bunyan says in his matchless allegory of one who likewise had many things against which to strive. "He also had a brave victory over his enemy: Let HIM grant that dwelleth above that we fare no worse, when we come to be tried, than he!"

I have not wished to preach Theology to you, but practical Religion. And I find that Christ Himself thought the great thing to impress on a human soul is just the homely but sublime truth, understandable from infancy, that there is a grand difference between Right and Wrong, and that we should choose Right. No doubt, much of doctrinal foundation underlies that, and is taken for granted in it. Love to that Blessed Redeemer, Who died for us and lives for us, is the great spring of all right-doing. And when we have failed to do right,—when we have gone wrong, as we all do daily,—then bless God for the great Gospel remedy, that precious Blood which takes all sin away; and that Blessed Spirit Who will help us in our daily endeavours to do right, and to conquer our own special temptation. Let us be good: but we can be only by the grace of God. Even people who did not know the New Testament found that out: the need of help

above ourselves. We know what the Help is. We know it comes for the asking. We ask it with our whole hearts.

> Dependent on Thy bounteous Breath,
> We seek Thy grace alone,—
> In childhood, manhood, age, and death,
> To keep us still Thine own!

XV.

BETTER THINGS ABOVE.

"It doth not yet appear what we shall be."—1 JOHN iii. 2.

YOU cannot have lived long in this world, without having observed that many things pass through various stages and transformations: and that the look of many things at one point in their progress gives us very little idea of what they will look like, and what they will be, farther on. There is a sort of regulation comparison which has been worked very hard on this subject: It is the caterpillar and the butterfly. I just remind you of it. If it had not been a very good and apt illustration, it would not have been used so often. A butterfly is very little like a caterpillar, but it was one once. That is sure.

Then you have seen the farmer busy at his wonderful work in the seed-time of the year. You have seen the ground after the grain has been sown. Man has done all he can for it; and he goes away and leaves it. But when you look over the bare brown field, you see just as little sign as may be of the waving

gold of the harvest days,—the rich ripe sheaves of Autumn. It doth not yet appear what there shall be.

Think of the diamond, fresh from the earth. There it is, a dull colourless pebble. There is no appearance *there* of the bright glancing gem, that glows and flashes like living fire, which skill and pains can make it. Think of the little acorn, that can be hidden in a child's hand. There is no appearance *there* of the great oak that shall strike its roots and spread its branches while generation of men after generation shall live and die. Yet the greatest oak in this world was an acorn once. But in the days when it was, it did not yet appear what there should be.

There is nothing that so touches some folk, as a thing with makings in it: a thing with growth in it: a thing with untold potentialities: a thing that may come to God knows what. Herein is the secret of the wonderful pathos some find in the sight of young children: of school boys and girls: of students at College with all their career to come. You have taken the measure of us who are in the middle passage: we shall never surprise you much unless (which the good God forbid) by doing something very foolish or very wrong. But our children,—the young hopes of the next generation,—how much better, happier, and greater, they may be! What parent worth counting,—what man or woman in middle age worth counting,—but will say God grant it so!

"It doth not yet appear what we shall be:" so

says the beloved Apostle John, speaking for all who have come to the Saviour. We are the sons of God already: and when our Blessed Redeemer shall appear in glory, we shall be infinitely better: indeed infinitely better, because we shall be like Him. But most of us are very unlike Him yet. And very little able, too, to form any clear conception of how it will be with us, then. The better world would need to be something exceedingly different from this world. But what like the better world is, we are not told: not told what the place, and the life, will be, in their details. It will be all good and happy, no doubt: but everything we used to know will have passed away. What should we give to the man, priest or prophet, who could let us look for a few minutes behind the Veil! Every diligent student of the New Testament knows the solemn reserve it holds as to what is *There*. Brief, general, without detail, manifestly figurative, are the notices of revelation as to the other world. And those who have been there and returned seem to have kept silence. "Lazarus, come forth:" and back from the unseen world comes the parted soul. Did his sisters never ask him, through the years of after-life, Where was he, those four days? If they asked him, and if he told them, there is no record of what his answer was: none at all.*

I feel, my friends, and sometimes feel it very awfully, the strange attraction there is in this line of thinking to

**In Memoriam:* XXXI.

which we have been led: standing as it were here, and straining our sight into the dark void: wondering what we, we ourselves, will be like when we have grown older by far than Methuselah: when we have lived for ages which no figures can express in places which no words can describe; but, though changed unutterably, are still ourselves,—the very persons that once knew these streets and came to this church. There is untold pathos in the fashion in which those whose dearest are in that unknown land, grasp at possible analogies to things in our being here, and think by lifting up and intensifying these to reach some conception to rest in: not less in the fashion in which others, in like manner tried, seem driven to turn away from all that seems of the earth, earthy,—turn away from *that*, even though it be in the direction of utter vacuity,—and cleave by a faith which is almost desperate in its grasp to this one thing, that "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." But *that* is not the line I desire to take in this discourse. I am not going to speculate as to what we, who are Christian people, may come to be, in a future and higher life: not even going to try to shew why it may be fit, and even necessary, that we live through our life here, and then go into the other world, in great blankness, only knowing that Christ is there, and many holy and beloved with Him: but I ask you to think of simpler things, for practical counsel and consola-

tion; and to take the serious declaration that "it doth not yet appear what we shall be" in the cheering aspect, and the easily-understood aspect, of an assurance that in Christ's presence there will be infinite improvement in all that is best here in the best men and women you have ever known: For which God's Name be praised. And doing this, we are doing what surely is always fit and well: we are understanding the text as that kind and gracious Apostle intended it should be understood: to certify us that whatever of good, of holiness and happiness, can be discerned in Christian men and women now, is nothing at all when compared with what is coming. Two things will be enough to name, as including pretty well all that ordinary believing folk can want. Exceptional persons, one here and one there, will desire more and other things,—as the clearing up of life's awful mysteries,—the answer to many wearing questions which are a true and heart-breaking wear to some,—the being "satisfied with knowledge:" and who can doubt that every aspiration, every longing, even the most childlike, that has in it nothing of evil,—will find what it wanted *there:* But let us be content to think of *Holiness*, and *Happiness*, as two greatly-comprehensive qualities of Christ's good children, in regard of which what they are *now* is small prognostic of what they will be *then.*

It is very pleasant to feel sure that the kindest and best friends we ever knew, who died and went to

Christ, are by this time beyond all comparing kinder and better than they were when they were here. The kindest and best woman in this world, where (God be thanked) there are innumerable so very kind and good that we are ready to think they must be but a very little lower than the angels, is not nearly so kind and good as the least in the kingdom of heaven. To speak of the sort of Christian people we know as being kind and good, seems more real than to speak of their being holy: both because whenever we come to use religious phrases, not used in ordinary conversation, it unhappily seems as though we were getting out of reality into a different region altogether; and also because the word seems to denote something quite above us,—something far higher and purer than the rough, working morality of the average bearer of the Christian name. It looks quite high-flown and extravagant to speak of people like us as being holy. And yet it stands in Scripture, stamped with authority, "Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:" and though, as the Catechism tells us, "the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness," still it is certain that some imperfect and lowly measure of what may be called by that name is present in every Christian person here. Then let us be glad that though to be kind and good does not take in the entire New Testament idea of being holy, yet it is a great part of it: it is the part of it which we are able to see: and it gives good ground for

trusting that the roots and foundations, in the sanctified heart, and the devout spirit, and the continual reference to Christ in all said and done, are right, and as they ought to be. Doubtless there are very many who in God's sight rank as holy ones, of whom we never see the best, and whom we should not rank as such. But there are very many too, who, seeing them at testing seasons in their life, we scruple not to be sure are God's children: really trying, in temptation and perplexity, to do as they think Christ would have them do: really trying to keep a devout, upward-looking spirit, pure, peaceable, humble, charitable, hopeful. And though there be a thousand failures, and slips, in temper, speech, and behaviour, yet we know *that* is the condition under which God has said we must live our life here: and we know that He looks to the willing mind, and accepts it in all imperfection.

But when we say this, is it not to confess that, unless in rare and thrice-blessed specimens of our race, sanctified from the cradle, and growing up amid the kindliest and most gracious spiritual influences, there is little trace now, in believing people, of the perfect holiness of the better country? "It doth not yet appear," unless to the Eye that sees the fruit in the seed, and the end from the beginning,—it doth not appear from anything that most of us are, "what we shall be." If it *did* appear: if all those who really have the root of the matter in them, looked

like it: if all true Christians manifested day by day the kindly, pure, and winning temper of a higher state; the name of Christian, of religious person, would be held in better estimation than it is by many now: many a stumbling-block that is meanwhile cast in men's way by the inconsistent and unamiable conduct and tempers of those who bear Christ's Name, would be removed; and each believer would be a living epistle in commendation of the faith he professes, "known and read of all men." But how different is the fact! Is it not true that most of us, in the matter of holiness, are not merely immeasurably far from what we trust "we shall be," but very far behind what has been attained by very many human beings of like passions and surrounded by like temptations with ourselves? Don't you feel, now, when in the New Testament, in history and in epistle, you find as it were unintentionally, and in the process of doing something far more practical, shadowed forth the character and inner life of St Paul,—do you not feel mightily humbled? This is a case in which it is right, it is bounden duty, to think of yourself in thinking what-like man was another. Do you not feel how far he was in advance of us in all spiritual attainment: that before we come to that, there is a weary long way to go: that if we ever are to be like him, "it doth not yet appear what we shall be?" Then remember that he, so far ahead of us, was far behind what he aimed at: Think of "forgetting those things

which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before:" Not in him, but in his Master and ours, we discern the ideal,—what the old German hymn-writer calls "the proper man," "the right man." And when we look at ourselves, as I suppose we sometimes do,—and very humbling work it is, God knows: when we think of our great imperfection in that so needful holiness: when we just think what charity it takes to use such a word of such a poor creature, and to say that we are holy at all: when we think of hasty, foolish, conceited, uncharitable words, and unsanctified tempers: when we look in upon that unseen world of which no man knows but a man's own self, and see the much amiss and the whole so short-coming there: Then, when turning away from all this evil and imperfection, we look on to that peaceful world where Christ's children shall be like Him,—and think of its stainless purity, of its perfect kindliness from which all envy and selfishness are shut out evermore, of the final impossibility of that which could irritate, or ruffle, or vex into unworthy feeling, in that full and passionless quiet,—and of *ourselves There:* Is it not truth the loved Apostle said, that "It doth not yet appear what we shall be?"

So far of Holiness. The text speaks truth also as concerning Happiness. No peace we have known here: not the sense (which some prize most) of being

fairly and quietly content: not the more stirring and jubilant exhilaration of heart which is possible for brief periods: not the lifting-up of soul and mind in specially-favoured devotion, perhaps in the silent closet, perhaps more commonly in the heart-felt and worthy praises of a great congregation: None of these experiences can bring to us any just notion of how happy blest beings are in Paradise. It is perfect peace and joy There: and as a matter of fact, not in any way ungratefully depreciating the many earthly blessings God's goodness gives us, we know that abounding lesser trials, and the impending possibility and the ultimate certainty of very awful ones,—and a certain unsatisfactoriness which God has mingled with every possession we can get except Himself, and the good part in His Son our Redeemer (which means the same thing),—we know that these things and more forbid that this life should be evenly joyous: make it impossible that this shall be our Rest. We forget them, many days: it is God's plain design we should: but just think for a moment (it is not morbid or unthankful to do *that*) of some things which must come to each of us. I do not wish to press them upon you: for perhaps as we grow older our minds run on them only too much. But think of needful separation from your children, and the sad alienation that comes of divided years, which you will fight against so vainly. Think of failing powers, of body and mind, which are just a matter of time,

and not long time; which must come, if we are spared in this world. Think, you who have been partners in life for many long (surely it ought to be short) years, helping, sympathising, always near each other,—that one or other of you will see the other dying,—will see the other dead.

And it is in the remembrance of what are the conditions of our being here; and with thankful acknowledgment that here we have received of God's goodness infinitely beyond what we deserve; that I say this life cannot be our rest, and this world cannot be our home. Safer, surer, more satisfying: without partings, without alienations: our true life must be. No doubt there is a great deal in this world of what may without extravagance be called Misery: and no prudence, no grace nor comfort from above, will make certain that the best believer shall not have his days in that dark, humbling, and crushing experience. But it is not with this world's misery that we need compare Heaven's peace: it is not in a soul bowed down by utter hopelessness and woe that we need say there does not yet appear the bliss and glory of a better world. Take the best this life can give: do not think of dull, depressed days: recall, too, the pure, unselfish, and elevating enjoyment that leaves no sting,—times when you did well to be happy, and which it is always pleasant to live over again in remembrance,—times of beneficent and devout elevation, when the heart was not merely lifted up, but lifted up towards God: not

mere sordid personal success nor selfish enjoyment: and think that even *that* kindly, joyous, and truly happy mood is but the farthest index of what is coming: that even then it did not yet appear how happy you shall be. We should think more of this. It is the way with some to depreciate happiness as a comparatively poor thing,—a selfish thing: and to speak as if it were a bad account of you if you think much of it;—holiness and self-forgetfulness and self-sacrifice are so infinitely better. But all this comes of utter confusion as to what, even here, anything with the least right to be called happiness is and must be. It comes of a most coarse conception of what is happiness. If you remember that the purest happiness is the outcome and function of holiness, and means that holiness is there in grand measure: that the true happiness is purely unselfish, and is mainly the reflection of happiness in other hearts: that no mere selfish enjoyment has the faintest title to the name of happiness: and if you think of the glimpses you have each had of how wonderfully happy you can be, and how good when so: I say you will then be assured that there is no grander thing, no more significant thing, told us about the Paradise where already are the best of the Race, than that it is the Place where all are happy. For, how pure, good, and kind they must be!

Wherefore we shall seek earnestly, each of us here today, that now, in this present time, this accepted time,

we may by God's grace, by penitence and faith, by our Saviour's Blood and the Blessed Spirit's sanctifying, become indeed the sons of God. For then, though we shall still be appointed to go where we shall be very different from what we are, yet all change that can pass upon us will be for the better. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be:" but we shall be perfectly holy, and perfectly blest.

And if we sometimes fancy, my Christian friends, in looking back upon our life, that much more and better might have been made of us by favourable circumstances: if we fancy that it doth not appear in what we are, what we might have been: if it seems to us that at divers points in our history, there have been critical events which stood between us, and our being far better and happier than we ever have been; let us rise above those useless regrets, and turn rather to the good and joyful hope which St John has set before us. Yes, doubtless more might have been made of all of us who have reached middle life: more wisdom, more enterprise, more industry, more tact, better luck, might have mended our worldly fortunes: and more earnestness, more prayer, more diligence in the use of the means of grace, might have made us far worthier of the name of Christian people than we can pretend to be. But if it be sad to look upon the marred material of which so much more might have been made, there is a

sublime hopefulness in the contemplation of that, whereof infinitely more and better will certainly yet be made. And of such texture are we. Not much more may be made of any of us in life: but who can reckon what will be made of us in immortality! Think of a "spiritual body:" Think of a perfectly pure and blessed soul: Think of us, so weak, foolish, and sinful now, indeed made like to our glorified Saviour! Think, these are the things which, if we are God's people, we may soberly expect. We will bear up, amid the sinful and sorrowful we are, in the confident expectation of what we shall be. For when *that* appears at last, it will be "the manifestation of the sons of God." And in that day, the long travail and expectancy of Creation will be past; and Christ's Kingdom of Glory come!

XVI.

REST IN THE SAVIOUR.*

"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden; and I will give you rest."—St MATT. xi. 28.

IT is a beautiful text: too beautiful almost to preach from. What sermon but will be a sad falling-off, coming after these words: who shall worthily sustain their music, or interpret all their meaning? The famous verse, which will not pass away till heaven and earth pass away, is rather for the meditation of devout hearts. But this is our Communion-Sunday: and for that reason, among others, the text is fit to-day. It is best, to-day, that our Saviour speak to His people, and they to Him: with not much intermeddling on the part of any human being. The most I desire is somewhat to guide your own meditations. I do not claim your attention, as I do on other Sundays. And I shall not be vexed, though now and then you should withdraw your attention from me and what I say,—feeling that you can better discourse from this text to yourselves. God, by His Blessed Spirit, guide us all!

"Rest." "I will give you rest." Let us have no cheap

* On a Communion-Sunday.

scholarship: but some present know that the very word *Rest* was not said by Christ. "I will give you rest," as Christ said it, is just two words: "I will give rest," is just one word. But it is rightly rendered in your New Testaments: you have exactly what Christ meant. And who durst have said *that*, but God Almighty! Who, that had a heart at all, would have mocked poor, weary humanity, by holding out this offer, unless knowing that he could give and do what man never could! Which of you, the wisest and kindest of you, would undertake certainly to calm one anxious spirit, or take the load off just one weary heart? And what must He have been, who could promise to do that to all! Never the soul to come so weary that He could not revive it: never the human creature to come who had made such a ravelled misery of this life as to be beyond His setting it all right again: never the mortal to come so worried and over-driven and beaten down, that He would need to confess that here was a case beyond His power to aid. Ay: the Man that said that text was God Almighty! No one less.

There was an old philosopher* long ago, they held him the wisest man of his time, who summed up his experience of man's life and toils and cares, by saying that "The end of work is to enjoy rest." And, truly, there is no pleasanter word or thing. We

*Aristotle.

come to feel that at last. The liking, the longing for it, must come at length. There are days when the young heart pants for larger excitement: when the strong arm is eager for earnest toil: when we are ambitious, and would fain do something which might be the talk of men. But the sobering years go forward. We grow wearied in the greatness of the way. The heart does not beat high for praise any more. We understand the Psalmist's vague aspiration,—"Oh, that I had wings like a dove: then would I fly away and be at rest!"

Now, when we would find true rest for our souls, we can find it only in Christ. He can give rest. He *does* give rest. Many have found it so. It is not a perfect rest in this world, nor a uniform rest, unless in the experience of a few saintly ones, very highly privileged both in grace and nature. And it is not freedom *from* labour and burden,—the active and the passive endurance, the doing and the bearing,—it is rest carried into the soul: a rest *in* the soul which takes much if not all the weight from burdens and toils without: the central peace which may subsist at the heart of endless agitation. There is a yoke to be borne, and not a light yoke: though He can make us so strong that the yoke grows easy to our feeling. There is worry: there is the irritable constitution: there are provocations: there is temptation: and sin will not be gone till we die. And yet, when we think what are the main sources of the soul's unrest, we

shall see that Christ, even in this life, is ready to deliver His people from them. Beyond that blessed, all-pervading quietness and confidence which are permitted to some, specially dwelt in by the Holy Ghost, and which must needs appear mystical to such as do not know them by experience, there comes a rest, there might come a rest, for which we can render a reason. I desire to show you that it is our own lack of living faith in Christ, if we have not, even in this world, found rest in Him. .

There are three things which are chief and weighty causes of disquiet and distress.

I mention first what ought to be the chiefest, though in fact it is not: the burden of sin. And I mean by this not merely the jarring and degradation of our whole being which come of evil in us, but the actual sense that God is angry with the wicked : that God has said He must punish the unforgiven sin, we do not know where or how, but very awfully. God "hates" sin : that is certain. Misery and utter loss, the spoiling and ruin of our very existence in consciousness, must follow unrepented and presumptuous sin : that is certain. Now, if we really took that in, and did not know of that precious Blood which takes sin away,—did not know God as the compassionate Father in Christ, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin : what an hourly, awful, crushing burden that would be ! Of course, it cannot strike us as it would strike a stranger: we are so familiar with the Old Story,

the blessed Gospel of mercy through the Cross, that we cannot, unless in some moment of special illumination, realise how Christ has taken the worst burden and disquiet from weary and lost humanity. And the upshot is, that I daresay many of us cannot really say that we ever felt our sins, and what follows of our sins, as a very heavy load. As for the wrath of God on account of sin, we should get on pretty well if *that* were our only cause of anxiety and unrest. If you see a man very depressed and overweighted, whatever it may be about, it is not likely to be about his sins and the terrors of God's law. And if, here and there, it be so, we call it morbid: we think it a matter of the nerves; we talk of change of scene and air. It is all reasonable that a man be very anxious about the risk of losing his fortune: but it is fanciful, as some think, that he should be very anxious about the risk of losing his soul. Dear friends, if we saw things rightly, and as they really are, we should feel that of all the burdens which can oppress us in this world, this is the weightiest: and when the Holy Spirit "convinces us of our sin and misery," as the Catechism says, what does that mean, but just making the soul see what an overwhelming weight our sins and the woe that follows on them make up together; and how inexpressible is our need that the great Sin-Bearer should take that load away!

I mention, secondly, what we can all understand

to be a weighty cause of human unrest: what is practically the weightiest. It is the fear, and the actual endurance, of the ills, the bereavements, the losses, the disappointments, that compass our path in this life: "the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to:" which keep many a poor soul in a constant dread of coming trouble that eats out all the enjoyment of its lot; and that you see the trace of it in the lined, anxious face, that can so swiftly take the look of alarm and trembling apprehension. I do not wish to talk ungratefully, or to suggest what may bring back to any heart here the old aching pang, or the old dead weight too well remembered: but no doubt Job was right. man is "born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward:" and those who knew not our Christian consolation have solemnly said that the pains of life outweigh its satisfactions. The great poet of old Greece, some of you know, wrote in his grand tongue words which mean this: "Not to be, is best of all: but, when one hath appeared in this world, then to return with swiftest step to whence he came, is next."

Now, Christ has changed all that: changed it utterly. I will say frankly, that if it were not for Christ, I should agree with Sophocles. Christ has cast a new light and meaning on all these troubles. We know what they come for. And we know Who will help us to get the good of them: ay, from greatest to least. Would that that great man had known

of the Blessed Comforter: had known of the Blessed Redeemer who takes the load of life's ills away!

Now, all the way appears
Steps unto heaven:
All that Thou send'st to me,
In mercy given:
Angels to beckon me
Nearer, my God, to Thee,—
Nearer to Thee!

And it is not merely that Christ sends the Holy Ghost to sanctify all sorrows into means of grace. To a certain extent,—and it is our own want of faith if it be not to a greater extent—Christ gives His own, even in this world, rest from worldly cares. I do not say that the soul that comes to Christ bids earthly cares farewell, and will never know earthly trouble and sorrow more. I do not say that even the Christian's little means may not be wrecked,—that his health may not break down,—that his fireside may not grow cold and lonely,—that his little children may not be taken—leaving behind the little worn lesson-book, the relics of the short life and its simple concerns, which the mother shews you with many tears. All experience forbids the dream that any magic line is drawn round the believer's dwelling, within which sorrow is a thing unknown: we need not fancy but that disquiet and trembling apprehension may sometimes come with the thought how frail and fleeting are the objects of earthly love: with the thought of the many sad possibilities which

hang over the lot of every mortal, some of them but too certainly and closely drawing near. And yet true it is and certain that but for our frailty of faith to trust everything to Christ,—to "cast all our care upon Him,"—we might experience a great relief from the anxieties, for ourselves and those dear to us, that bow us down, and take the spring out of us, and age us before our time. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee." Well, we do not look so high as *that:* we shall be content with lowlier things. Then: "Be careful for nothing: but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God: And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." We might try for this: we might reach after this. We might cleave to the "All things shall work together for good to such as love God." I have not heart to speak in a high-flown way about that promise: I do not know exactly what it means: only I am sure it does not mean what at the first look some would fancy,—nor what I have known it made in the sermons of preachers whose sermons had no earthly adaptation to the real facts of man's life here. Then, "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." Then the hopeful words—like the sunshine through rain—the "nevertheless afterward,"—I am not going to repeat the verse. Then the ancient music, sad and sweet, that stirs

tears and smiles together, "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." We will put a confiding hand in Christ's blessed Hand, and go where He leads us: and then we shall have the rest He meanwhile intends for us,—though the heart within be somewhat sore and heavy, and the cheek wet with human tears. "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel; and afterward receive me to glory."

I mention, thirdly, in very few words, as a cause of human unrest, the eager, anxious pursuit of those things to which worldly persons give their whole heart: worldly gain and good, wealth, eminence, distinction. We come, here, to matters of less personal concern to ourselves: we may well be thankful that the lot of most saves from the din and strife of great worldly ambitions; but we know it is hard to reckon the envies, mortifications, and disappointments, of which these are the source. A man who sets his heart upon rising to an eminent place in the world of politics, or the world of letters, or the world of business,—we do not blame him,—it is right there should be such,—good men may if they will enter upon that race,—but what a fever they put themselves in the way of, and what spiritual risk: what an amount of anxiety and vexation, hope and fear, unrest and disquiet must they go through, as they are struggling and fighting their way upwards, even should they prove

successful at the last. One has read biographies, and autobiographies, of men who towered above their fellows, from which a humble Christian might well turn with a thankful heart that his modest powers and his lowly lot forbade the like feverish strife, the like sore temptation. Ah, the fears, the depreciations, the hopes deferred, the plans disappointed, the unworthy envyings of those more and even less successful, the dread of new competitors rumoured, the ferment of heart, the perpetual self-seeking shewn so simply when the good man was quite unaware of it, that make some recent books very humbling to read, and a warning to all of us! But one has read Lives too, the Lives of those who reached the highest places in the State, which shewed pleasantly how Christ's Spirit in the heart could calm the fever, and sweeten the acerbities of the race for worldly success. Truly, if the Christian realised his privileges and possessions, he might join in it, if at all, without fever, and be distanced in it without a pang: for he has already the one thing needful, and he can dispense with all beside. To "win Christ," is the great thing: and, God be thanked, commonplace folk can do *that*. To be like Christ in heart and life is the great thing: and by God's grace *that* may be attained in any earthly lot, high or lowly,—perhaps the Valley of Humiliation is the safer place. We do not need to be eminent in our profession or vocation, to be Christ's faithful soldiers and servants, growing some-

what meet for heaven. And a life on earth, in which you utterly fail to reach every worldly thing on which you set your heart, yet which prepares you for a better world,—*that* life is not failure.

Now, looking back, is it not true that even here, Christ in good measure gives His people rest? The disquiet of the burdened conscience He takes away: the heavy weight of unforgiven sin. The fear of earthly chances and changes He takes away: In some way or other the Lord will provide. The unrest of ambition He lifts above: Should the believer be greatly anxious about the result of any earthly contest or race, when he has already won a prize worth a thousand times more than all earthly prizes put together? Aye, dear friends; often burdened as we are, often disquieted as we are, we can see that the fault does not lie with our Saviour. The fault lies in our own lack of faith to fully trust Him, if He has not given us rest!

We humbly hope that on this day, when we are allowed to share the chiefest of the appointed means of grace, we may find a special rest of soul vouchsafed, a special quietness and confidence. Very many Christian people have found that at the table of communion they are, not in a vehement or very emotional way, but in a quiet and simple way, better and happier people than elsewhere, and commonly. It is a firm fact in Christian experience that is ex-

pressed in the old familiar phrase, to come up to the mount of ordinances. You are near your Saviour: and in that Presence the power of sin in you is greatly weakened, and there is felt something of a heavenly calm. Things that ruffle and vex you more than they ought, lose their power. It is a homely and kindly Tabor: Surely it is good to be here! And the good of the experience abides, after the hour of communion is gone: you have gone away from the holy table in sober fact stronger to do duty and to resist temptation and to abide sorrow than before. And it is no wonder: For "they that worthily communicate feed upon Christ's body and blood, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace: have their union and communion with Him confirmed: testify and renew their thankfulness, and engagement to God; and their mutual love and fellowship each with other." "They that worthily communicate in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, do therein feed upon the body and blood of Christ, not after a corporal and carnal, but in a spiritual manner; yet truly and really, while by faith they receive and apply unto themselves Christ crucified, and all the benefits of His death."*

These blessings are offered to us: These words are true. There is a better rest, indeed, than that which can be found here: and for the entire fulfilment of Christ's promise of which we have thought this morn-

* Larger Catechism: Answers 168 and 170.

ing, we must look beyond the grave. "There remaineth a rest for the people of God:" and the utmost they can experience in this world is but the foretaste of that perfect peace. There, all strifes, sins, temptations, and sorrows are past: and the best of the Church are there.

XVII.

BY THE GRACE OF GOD.

"But by the grace of God I am what I am."—1 Cor. xv. 10.

HERE is St Paul speaking; speaking about himself. I suppose hardly any man has ever yet succeeded in speaking about himself in a fashion perfectly satisfactory. And so the wiser way is not to speak of one's self at all. I do not mean merely that no one has succeeded in treating that perilous subject in a manner which could not be found fault with: There are those who can and do find fault with anything, said or done by anybody, except themselves. What is meant is that people's ideas of what is fitting vary so much, and the same people's ideas so vary from time to time, that you will never get anybody (even the fairest and most unenvious) to agree that words, whether of self-laudation or self-depreciation, said by any mortal, are exactly what in perfect taste and feeling they ought to be. The simple-minded self-puffery which is found among the less cultured, may be put by with a smile: and one remembers how a late easy-going Prime Minister said, as the result of long experi-

ence, that it is impossible to over-rate human vanity. Far more unlovely is that way of puffing one's self in which one's self is not expressly named; but a steadfast depreciation practised of every one else; evidently in the presence of an unexpressed comparison: and an unscrupulous policy pursued of keeping back any one else, as far as possible, from any little distinction. A special evil of this unworthy frailty is that it tends to reproduce itself in others: for not many have that generosity and noble-mindedness which will continue heartily to admire and praise another who takes everything as of right and gives nothing in return.

Let us get away from this to something higher and better: let us see how St Paul speaks of himself. He was not incapable of self-assertion, that great Apostle. I will confess that it always rubs one rather against the grain, when he takes to boasting, as he himself calls it: and you remember how he himself thinks it needful to apologise for it; not, apparently, without some uneasy feeling that he had better have left it out. "I am become a fool in glorying:" Well, perhaps he had. But we put all that behind us: There is no boasting in my text. He looks back on what he had been, Pharisee and persecutor. He thinks of what he is; preacher of the Cross, who would (when it came to what he really meant in his heart) glory in nothing other. He is very thankful: he is very humble: In a worthy nature, thankfulness is always of closest kin to the deepest humility. Here are his words, how

sincere God knew. "I am the least of the Apostles, that am not meet to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am."

Here is St Paul at his best: Here we find nothing we could wish otherwise: No boasting, nor glorying, nor folly here. Of course, we take absolute sincerity for granted. Sometimes, extravagant self-depreciation, where not morbid and temporary, is the outcome of inordinate self-conceit: and insincere humility, "pride that apes humility," there is nothing, a great thinker* has told us, the Devil likes so well. And it may well be so.

St Paul's statement is just the last that most men would make, really intending it to be accepted. All the merit of his position, whatever that might be, was his Saviour's. He leaves himself out of view, except as the unworthy being on whom God had been pleased to shower unmerited kindness. Now, it is pleasing to any man, when he has reached wealth, power, station, to be able to say, "I made all this myself: I owe nothing to anybody: I carved out my own way: In short, by my own exertion, by the energy of my arm, by the wear of my brain, I am what I am!" You could not mortify some men more than by telling them that their position in life, however influential and honourable, has just been formed by circumstances. And it is always a thankless task, to remind a man

* Coleridge.

who has risen in the world (and a man may have risen very much in the world and yet not be very high) of the steps of the ladder by which he got up. There is a conventional modesty which keeps people of sense from directly praising themselves: but it is an understood thing that a man may praise himself to the extent of telling us that whatever he has done, he did himself. And no one will say that such an expression of honest independence is either wrong or unamiable. There is such a thing as merit between man and man. It is only towards God that creature-merit is impossible; and that man is bound to take the lowly place taken by St Paul in the text. There readily occur many instances of this pleasing and natural self-praise. One of the most lovable of English poets,* in the preface to his collected works takes occasion to tell us, that whatever may be their merits or demerits, they are entirely his own: he neither begged nor borrowed them from any man. The schoolboy at the top of his class is anxious it should be known it is all of his own fair work. In the great University where I studied, a student had to declare that his prize-essay was of his own unaided composition. A barbaric Eastern king† a little since sent a letter, written in the English language, to our Queen: and one likes him the better because he was at pains to assure our ambassador to his Court that he had composed and written every word of that letter himself. And you will think of one illustrious

* James Montgomery. † The First King of Siam.

self-made statesman,* whose eloquent page remains to tell us that *he* was never rocked, and swaddled, and dandled into a legislator,—but that he had fought his own way, and made his own position. Indeed, it would be endless to reckon up the forms in which we find men virtually saying, "By my own honest labour, and with no help from any other, I am what I am." St Paul takes just the other turning. He is at no pains to set out or establish his claim to be regarded as a self-made man. On the contrary, he repudiates all merit of his own, as concerns that great order of interests of which he was thinking. It is "By the grace of God I am what I am."

Now I do not mean to say that it argues any extraordinary humility or insight in the Apostle, that he said *that:* when we remember what the sphere of things was which he had in view. I do not mean to say but that the honest and independent worker, who claims to be a self-made man, who has got on by helping himself, will readily and without a shade of inconsistency admit that it was all by God's help. And this not as a mere phrase, but knowing and feeling it far more deeply than any words can say. Above all, in the matter of our religious life, every one of the least Christian experience knows in himself that God is working in us when we are working most earnestly and consciously ourselves. I am not going to dwell upon special circumstances in St Paul's history

* Burke.

(though they are there) which give a special force to the text, said of him. Nor am I going to take up (though I had thought of that) some of the chief items in St Paul's character, some of the things that mainly went to make him the man he was; and then try to show that in a more marked sense than ordinary we may make out in these the working of a Divine Hand, and the effect of the grace of God. *That* might be done: but it seems now as if it would be more profitable to go away from anything peculiar to the character and position of a man of a very special and exceptional character, who had lived a very special and exceptional life,—and think rather of those points in regard to which St Paul's words may be taken up by every Christian, and applied to his own individual case. For in regard to all that concerns our Christian character, our work here and our outlook for eternity, each believer may say and must say, "By the grace of God I am what I am."

For one thing, a Pardoned Sinner.

Let us think of elementary truths. For we forget them.

I say nothing of St Paul's special sins before his conversion. I do not think they were much aggravated. He was always an honest and zealous man, according to his light: when he persecuted God's people, he was a mistaken man, he thought he was doing God service. Now, most of us have done wrong, times without number, not under any delusion that we

were doing right: So far, worse than the persecutor Saul.

But every man is by nature and practice a sinner: Every Christian has his sins pardoned: and this pardon comes simply of the grace of God. There is but the one Door whereby people like us can enter the Fold of those who are saved: By repentance towards God and faith in Jesus we must be forgiven: justified, as the New Testament calls it, freely of God's grace.

Of course, we have all been cautioned, many times, against the delusion, that the pardon of our unworthiness can come in the least degree of our own doings and deservings. Yet the notion, that surely we can do something that may be set over against our sins, is one that waxes and grows so spontaneously, that it is a right thing to take every occasion to remind ourselves that it is wrong. It is like a weed that you are not done with when you have cut it down or pulled it up once; but that you must keep perpetually seeing to, and every now and then rooting up once more.

Now, such a statement as that in the text comes home to us even more strongly than the best-put expression of doctrine, or than the most ingenious argument in support of it. It is a common saying, that example goes farther than precept. Then here is the doctrine of free forgiveness for Christ's sake practically exemplified. For here is one so freely forgiven who might, if ever man could, have hoped

he had done and suffered so much for Christ as might have put away the remembrance of his shortcomings. But it was not so. I would I could put into our tongue the untranslatable music of the one line in the grandest uninspired hymn,* which tells how God saves such as shall be saved for nothing they themselves can do: † putting that blessed truth in phrase so direct and homely that we should think it irreverent now. But here is St Paul looking upon the past: thinking of the load of guilt that once sat heavy upon him: turning to the happier present day in which he had the comfortable hope that "being justified by faith," he was "at peace with God:" putting it on everlasting record that all this was through no merit of his own; and saying "By the grace of God I am what I am."

For a second thing, a Sanctified Believer.

Every Christian person is not merely pardoned sinner; but likewise sanctified believer. Pardon, as has been often said, gives the title to heaven: but the fitness for heaven is needed just as much. It would be no blessing for the unsanctified soul to be admitted to heaven. It would be a very irksome and distasteful place. You know that even here, we cannot enjoy a thing unless we are fitted to do so. Suppose you took one of the most ignorant and stupid savages from the South Seas, and brought him into a

* The Dies Irae. † Qui salvandos salvas gratis.

circle of the most brilliant geniuses of the age,—men to listen to whose talk would be the highest pleasure to any educated person here: do you think, you would be doing any kindness to the savage? The greatest and wisest of human beings was Shakespeare. But not everybody can find entertainment in reading what he wrote. "Was there ever such stuff as Shakespeare?" was the question of George the Third. Such comparisons give but the most imperfect notion of the utter incompetency of the unregenerated man to feel the smallest interest or pleasure in the employments of heaven. Now, God never befools a man, by giving him, under the name of a blessing, what would be only a trouble and a weariness. And hence it is, He never gives the title to heaven without giving the fitness for it. So it is that every pardoned sinner is, in some humble measure, sanctified. I have tried, on another occasion, not for the encouragement of the slothful, but for the cheering and helping onward of those ready to think hardly and despairingly of themselves, to set out what is the very least thing the New Testament will let us understand by being sanctified. Surely we cannot go lower than that we should have in our hearts "an unfeigned desire to be found in Christ, and to depart from iniquity." True repentance is surely the very earliest germ of anything that can be called holiness. God give it to each of us: but whether we have reached high attainments or stay yet at the very humblest, "by the grace of

God we are what we are." Perhaps it takes a deeper humility to feel from the heart that any good about us is only of God's grace, than even to feel that the pardon of our sin comes thence. There is a conscious effort after growing better, in the renewed man's heart. He is trying hard to put down within him what is unlovely, what is mean, what is bad. You do not merely pray to get free of some unworthy feeling towards a neighbour: you painfully struggle with it. And not with much success. It does seem a stern requirement that after one has been sensibly working towards an end, he must own that if he has got nearer it at all, it is purely the doing of some one else. But it seems stern only to those outside. The believer does not find it hard at all. "Not I, but Christ in me," comes quite naturally: and it says what he knows is the simple truth. You remember the lines attributed to Milton, that speak of a lower inspiration: they give the plain fact. "I feel the stirrings of a gift Divine: Within my bosom glows unearthly fire, Lit by no skill of mine!"

For a third thing, St Paul was, by God's grace, an heir of eternal glory.

Now here we come to a thought which explains a certain general exultation which is in the text. It is plain enough that when St Paul wrote "By the grace of God I am what I am," he thought that in what he was, there was something both to be glad at and to

be thankful for. But a worldly man, judging by appearances, might have said, listening to such words from the Apostle's lips, that really there was nothing about him whose origin needed special explanation: no such great matter for that thankfulness and hope which beam through the well-known sentence. The weary wayfarer, with his doctrine to preach which the ignorant stumbled over and the refined smiled at: the workman, who laboured with his hands and so earned his bread: the lonely man, with no kindly home circle to cheer him after the day's toil was over, and familiar with stripes and prisons: surely it seemed hardly needful that one like *that* should tell us that God's grace had made him so. He was no great matter to look at, after all. But there is a light and a dignity cast upon that lowly lot and that way-worn man, when we call to mind what he is yet to be. The spirit that would some day be made perfect lay hid under that unpromising bodily presence. That humble path tended onwards to the highest heaven. And "Paul the aged," whom any day might make Paul the martyr, was as the heir of a fair domain whose fields and woods were in another land: he walked this world like some disguised monarch who had laid his crown aside for a little while: his lowliness was the lowliness of the veiled angel, that has hid his mighty wings. From the thorny ways of his daily life, filled, as we know it was, with irritations, disappointments, and prosaic worries, he caught glimpses from afar of the

Home to which each day brought him nearer; and could sun his spirit in its ceaseless light, and gladden his ear with its ceaseless songs. Not the present day, not the Apostolic office, not the Apostolic labours and successes, were the great thing. All *that* was Christ; but to pass to the rest beyond these things was gain.

The same prospect lies before each believer: Each, like St Paul pardoned and sanctified, is like St Paul "heir of the Kingdom which God has promised to them that love Him." And dimly as we know what is meant by that Kingdom, we know so much of it as makes us feel deeply that if we are heirs of it now, if it be given us to enter There hereafter, it must be all of God's grace. Would the saintliest Apostle, would the Martyr that suffered most,—dream that if it came to repaying him, he had deserved the reward of a life say as long as Methuselah's: Would he dream of merit, of repayment in proportion for what he had done and suffered, thinking of a blissful life which will never end at all? Ah, the reward so outweighs the race, and the crown the battle, that it needs little spiritual discernment, little beyond the use of worldly common sense, to see that Not by his own deserving will any man enter upon life eternal! No doubt, we feel it as we grow older, and the end of the pilgrimage sometimes looms in sight, instead of life having that vague, unbounded look-out which to the young makes it practically an Eternity,—we feel that the future life and

reward must be either Eternity or Nothing: that if the future life is to end at all, it may as well never begin, for it would be utterly unsatisfying, and we might better get into Nothingness at once and be over: But herein, by God's grace, is the pledge of our immortality, the assurance that our soul's portion is in God; even in that Blessed Redeemer Whom to know is life eternal, Whom to be with ever is glory, is heaven. We speak of that prospect soberly, for God's Word tells us little, and we know nothing more: anything like high-flown phrase, anything fanciful, anything that goes beyond the sure statements of holy Scripture or even varies materially from its language, has come, in these days, unless in the chartered licence of a very few specially dear hymns, to affect right-minded persons with a very keen distaste. The vague loveliness of the Golden City will not be comprised in any words but such as are inspired: The Undiscovered Country, sought so long, must remain undiscovered by human beings, till we pass within the Veil and see Christ. Nor indeed would lofty phrases much appeal to lowly Christian hearts, growing wearied in the greatness of the way, and content, well content, if by God's mercy they may but enter in. To sit upon thrones, to wear crowns,—be these glories to such as desire them: let us sit, like Mary, at our Saviour's feet. That will do. "The hope of glory" is now, with most, a humble hope: It is the hope of purity, the hope of peace: It looks for deliverance from worldly trouble, from

anxious care: It is of no more pain, no weary nights, not to be worried any more: *That*, believe one who practically knows sufferers and how they feel, is the common Christian's good hope through grace. And now, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, let us say with the great Apostle St Peter:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead: To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.

XVIII.

DEATH ABOLISHED.

"Our Saviour, Jesus Christ: Who hath abolished death."—2 TIM. i. 10.

"WHO hath abolished death:" and whatever perplexity there may be about the moral force of the strong statement, as to its grammatical meaning there is no doubt at all. To abolish means to make an end of, root and branch; to absolutely make cease to exist, and be as if it had never been. To say that our Saviour has abolished death,—and to say it in the peculiar fashion in which scholars will know St Paul says it here,—is to say that He has annihilated death: made death nothing: brought things to this point, that we may say truly there is no such thing as death. To take the words of a careful expositor* of Holy Scripture, writing of this renowned verse, it tells us that "*Death*, not merely in some particular instance, but in all its aspects and bearings, and in its very essence, being, and idea, is abolished." And it is a bold saying, as well as a big one: there is no doubt as to *that*.

* Bengel.

A bold saying: does it not seem a false one? Does it not seem about as bold and about as true as it would be to say that black is white; or to make any other assertion the most glaringly in the teeth of common sense and reason? Speak of any one, how mighty soever, as even going to abolish death: and looking back, and looking round, what a strange and impossible work we should judge that to be! But it is a strange saying indeed, that One, who for eighteen hundred years has been gone from this world, did, before He left this world, actually and soberly abolish death.

Believing as we believe, we are sure the text must be true in some sense, or it would not stand where it does. And yet, with the facts all about us we see: looking back each on the history of his own little household: feeling, as we are sometimes startled into feeling, that we are the survivors, growing few, of those who set out with us, and that the best are gone: thinking of the empty chair by the fireside and the vacant place at the table, and of the little one that went who is often in the silent memory though not many times named now: if the truth were told, I believe that many could tell us that this text looks often like a mockery, and that death in fact is not abolished at all: if at all, only in some very unreal sense. And I will confess that as one gets older, and comes to want reality in religious instruction, and to loathe and abhor flummery, there is not a thing so disappointing,

I will say so sickening, as to find a passage of Scripture that seems to promise us something we urgently need, something good and great, turned and twisted about till it is shown to mean nothing that we really care much about; while yet it is all true, in that fashion "that keeps the word of promise to our ear, and breaks it to our hope." I am not going to treat my text so, be sure. In some force that is plain and substantial and without evasion, our Redeemer *has* abolished death; or else this text is a lie. But we have lived long enough to learn,—and it was a trial and a disappointment to learn,—that the New Testament does not always say what we might think it says in reading it through. There is no greater folly than to say that the right meaning of a text must be that which a plain person, reading our English version, would take to be the meaning of it. No: scholars must exercise their function here, and tell us what the Apostle meant: and you must hold in view, likewise, things said by him elsewhere; and the time at which he wrote; and the way in which what he wrote would be taken up by people then. Yet I am sure I shall be able to show you what St Paul intended when he wrote my text: and to show you that in a plain and obvious sense it is true,—a sense far plainer and more obvious to the people who first read it than it is to us, born and bred in gospel light. St Paul was not playing with words, to the mockery of breaking hearts: That good man had it not in him to use the arts of a

vulgar sensational preacher or tract-writer. But I will tell you honestly that the simple-hearted bereaved will not be greatly cheered by anything the text says. If such are not disappointed when they are told the text's true meaning, it will be because they did not expect much from it in the respect of what would come much home to their own desolated hearts. The bitterness of the death *we* know, is not past. Frankly, death is not abolished nearly so much as we should like: We wish it were abolished a great deal more. And in the unutterable bitterness and blankness of great bereavement, even amid all Christian consolation, we break down: and will, while this world of sin and sorrow abides.

Let me tell you first, in half-a-dozen sentences, how men, explaining Scripture, have pulled about my text, and tried to get over the difficulty in it. Some say it speaks true, because Christ has in the case of His own people abolished soul-death: abolished that "death in trespasses and sins" in which human beings are sunk by nature: abolished spiritual death. Others say, You may fairly enough assert that Christ has abolished death, because by His miracles on earth He sometimes vanquished it and set it aside: He raised the dead to life again, and so abolished death. Others say, Christ has abolished death, inasmuch as He burst its fetters in His own person: He rose from the dead, and vanquished the power of the grave. Others again explain that the text means that Christ has abolished

death (to His redeemed ones) as a penal enactment: To the true believer in Jesus death is no longer a punishment, that is. And it is maintained by others that when St Paul wrote that "our Saviour Jesus Christ *hath* abolished death," the meaning is just that it is so sure and certain that He *will* abolish death, that you may speak of it as if it were a thing already done. These are some of the ways in which those who have written on Scripture have sought to show that it is no mis-statement or exaggeration to say what is said in my text. It seems to me that they are very poor ways. They come to this: that the text is not true; but the commentators hold a brief for the defence; and accordingly must use the unscrupulous arts of men who defend a wrong-doer, whether in criminal courts or Church courts. Of course, in understanding the text, we may narrow down the assertion it makes to the case of Christian people. For though it be not said that it is only for His own ransomed and believing ones that Christ has abolished death, still it may fairly be said that so much is conveyed to us by the entire spirit of the passage. And, with this restriction, the text is literally true in this plain sense, that Christ has abolished the death that was here, and that men knew, before He came, lived, taught, died, and rose. The thing we call death now, is not the same thing which men called by that name before our Blessed Redeemer was here.

The difficulty lies all in this: that when we read

the text, we forget to whom it was written, and how long ago: we think of the death we see and hear of every day: we think of the death which consists in the soul parting from the body, and the body going back to the dust: and *that* death, we know, is not abolished, nor anything like it: it is here, the darkest and saddest thing in this world; and it will take away every generation till the last that shall see Christ come. But then the old death,—the thing St Paul was thinking of when he wrote the text,—the thing poor human beings knew and feared in heathen lands and ages,—the dark and painful mystery, that took men absolutely away from everything here, took them within an impenetrable veil, took them to an undiscovered country, wherein none could tell whether they were to be or not to be,—*that,* for Christian people, has been thoroughly and entirely abolished: *that* is gone!

That we may be sure of this, let me remind you of what death was before Christ; and then compare *that* with what death has grown now,—specially thinking of what death is to such as are blest with a true and strong faith in Him.

Now, what was death before Christ? What was death before Christ "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel?" What is death yet, to people who have learned nothing of it from God's revelation: to people who look at death without

having heard of Christ, or without believing in Christ? I know that in putting these questions I am stepping among the hot embers of controversy: some of these embers, indeed, grown much cooler of late years than they once were. But, speaking with all due carefulness, I may say as something beyond controversy, that to human beings without revelation, to human beings to whom God had told nothing about the thing, death was just what you can see of it, and no more. And how strange: how tremendously awful: how utterly hopeless a thing, must death look to those who know nothing more of it than what they see, and what their own reason can make out and infer from what they see! I do not dwell upon the mournful accessories of the great change, though these are very terrible when it is coming upon any one you really care for: I do not speak of hollow cheek and wasted eye: of the pain, the weariness, the long days and nights of suffering and unrest, that make the avenue to death, that make the sad shading-off between life and death,—when it does not come more startlingly in a fearful unexpected shock, the "sudden death" from which Christian people have through ages prayed to be delivered: I do not dwell upon accessories: Think what the thing in its essence was in that deep darkness shot with fitful gleams which has been called the *light of nature*. The soul, they saw, was gone: *that* (call it whatsoever) which had thought, felt, and loved, was gone,—no one knew whither. A man

stood beside the friend he had loved, and talked with: all whose cares he had known and understood so well: but he felt they were parted now by a severance that was absolute: not the wide Atlantic can divide like death: they could not exchange a syllable now, were it to save a world: and the living had not an inkling of the present thoughts and concerns of the dead. And then the body! The heart could not beat, the eye could not see: the dearest voice never could catch the attention of the dull, cold ear. Something was gone (call it whatsoever), without which all the machinery of animal life must stand still. And not colourless cheek, nor strange, unfamiliar expression of feature, can so impress, as the quiet regardlessness. You have seen the child's bitter sobs and tears beside the dead father: the father who in life would have been so eager to soothe and cheer: and thought how strange was the immovable repose. That which is left cares not at all, now.

But this is not all. The great law of decay, the law that what has lived and now no longer lives must go back to the elements, now asserts its right: men have frantically fought against it, but always in vain. What was so dear must be hidden from sight: given to kindred earth, or to swifter flame. Useful hand, weary heart, kindly face, must go. Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust!

And that was all. That was death before Christ brought life and immortality to light. For the soul,

if there was a soul, extinction; or, a leap in the dark, no one knew whither. For the body, and no doubt there was a body, sorrowful corruption, and the unconscious clay. Time would go on, go on: but would bring no hope, no change. Ages have passed, since men first died: but there is no revival of the dead generations. You had seen your last of those you loved: brother, father, child. You had parted for ever.

Yes: *that* was death. And now I say that since Christ was here, that old death is abolished: literally abolished. It is gone out, it is done with, there is an end of it, to every one who believes what Christ taught. Christ, to all who credit His testimony, but specially to such as entrust their souls to Him, has abolished that ancient mystery and terror. There is still a thing we call death: we wish there were not: for there is much about it which is humbling, which is heart-breaking: and our faith is weak, and it fails us when we need it most. But though the name is not changed, the thing is changed, vitally and essentially. It is a dark door, and lowly: but Christ went through it Himself: and if you would enter into eternal life, into perfect kindliness, purity, and rest, you must enter by this Door. It is the transition from this world to that which is far better. It is the gate of immortal life. And "through the grave, and gate of death, we pass to our joyful Resurrection."

Come now and let us think what Christ has made

of death. Let us calmly consider what it is now, for His own redeemed and believing ones.

As for the soul, death means instant entrance into the happiness of the Paradise above. Christ has told us two things about what comes of the soul at death, which no mortal could certainly know unless God told him. For one, the soul lives on though the body dies: It does not go out with this life. For another, we know where the redeemed soul lives when the body dies: in peace and rest with Christ. "With Me in Paradise:" these are the words. It is but bowing the head as if to leave one chamber: and lo, we pass into the next: and He is There. Let us be glad of the sound and clear teaching we got in childhood: "The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory." *Immediately:* there is to the blest soul no middle space at all between earth and heaven. Do not think that the beloved ones you have seen die, had a long way to go to meet Christ after they left you. Do not think, parents, that the little child, after he left you, had to travel a dark solitary way, through which you would earnestly have wished, if it could have been, to lead that little man by the hand, and bear him company till he came into the presence of God. You did all you could have wished to do. You did bear him company into Christ's very presence. The moment he left you, the little one was with Him.

And then, for the body, what has Christ made death? Only a long, quiet sleep, till the morning of the great awaking. And even such as cherish the vain fancy, that without God's revealing light men might have come to believe in the immortality of the soul, must needs confess that but for him who is the Resurrection and the Life, no man would have believed in the resurrection of the body. Yet you know the confident declaration that stands in every Christian creed. "I believe in the resurrection of the body!" Wheresoever the Apostles went, they preached "Jesus and the Resurrection." The mortal part of the saintliest has no exemption from the lot of all. The last breath must part: it must turn to dust, sooner or later: and, so far as concerns our faith, it matters not at all how swiftly or how slow. But even the body is not done with. We have not looked our last on the kindly face which for the present we see no more. The years will pass on, and they may count up into ages; till no trace shall be left resembling you or me. But "the body, still united to Christ, rests in the grave till the resurrection:" the sacred dust is held in charge by the elements: and in some true sense the mortal part will rise again, the mortal having put on immortality: body and soul must be united to make the glorified human being, as they together made the sinful and sorrowful human being: and "when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall

have put on immortality, Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory!" You think of that simple, natural piety, which called the churchyard God's Acre. And indeed it is sown with the seeds, howsoever unrecognisable, of God's harvest: and the day of the resurrection will be His in-gathering day.

So, *There* is the thing which in the case of the true believer, we now call death. Perfect peace and immortal life to the soul: Quiet rest and a blissful awaking to the body. When we say that a Christian dies, we mean that he has gone to be for ever with his Saviour. Of course, it is many times a bitter loss to those left here: the hopeful life cut short in its promise: the useful life on which so much depended, brought to what *we* should call an untimely close. And though heaven is much better than Fifeshire, it is a very different thing to have a dear friend there, far away, from having him here by our side. Yet, after all, the parting is but for a little while: the "few short years of evil:" and then, by God's grace, to meet, where friends are never parted.

My friends, get out of the indifference that comes through familiarity with long-known truths: and look at the two things. See the old thing that men called death, painful, awful, mysterious, hopeless: something that could not be avoided, and yet that could scarce be borne: something that to all but the most heartless must have overclouded all life by the

thought of the inevitable end, and all affection by the shadow of endless separation. And then, see the new thing Christian men and women mean by death, humbling still, and sorrowful, because our faith is so weak: but if our faith were clear and strong, then all hopeful with the promise of abundant entrance where alone all will be well with us, and there will be no sin nor sorrow any more. And now, did St Paul say too much? Is there not soberest truth in this sublime declaration, that "Christ hath abolished death!"

Hath He abolished it for each of us, present here? Let that be our parting thought. Have we committed ourselves to Him: Do we commit ourselves to Him anew every day: burdened with sins innumerable which only His precious blood can take away; leavened through our whole nature with sinfulness never to be purged out unless by the inspiration of His Blessed Spirit? For the great change will come, *that* is sure: it will find each of us out, and take us from all we have Here: and if we have nothing There, no provision nor inheritance, what an awful destitution! The tree is grown that shall yield to each of these living forms its last narrow house and dark. But, clinging simply to the Cross: very weary, very perplexed, very ignorant of what is beyond: we shall yet await without fear the peaceful coming, not of the old enemy death, but of our Blessed Redeemer.

XIX.

THE BURNING OF THE BOOKS AT EPHESUS.

"Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver."—ACTS xix. 19.

YOU could hardly pitch upon a verse in the New Testament, which, in its first and literal meaning, seems more thoroughly away from all the interests of Christian life in these present days than this. You may be sure that no Christian preacher would select this text as the foundation of a sermon, for the mere first meaning of the fact it records, about human beings and human interests which have been gone for many hundred years. We have long since ceased to think or speak seriously of witchcraft as a present reality. We have a sad reminder of the old belief very near us,* but an age of extreme credulity as to pretexts of supernatural power and knowledge, has been suc-

* An expanse of sea under the cliffs at St Andrews, which at low water is enclosed by a reef of rocks, bears the name of *The Witches' Lake.*

ceeded by one of extreme scepticism as to these: and all such things are now esteemed as pieces of vulgar imposture, not likely to have any weight with people of the most ordinary education. But, when we consider the text a little longer, we shall find that there is a great deal more in it than a mere account of what became of a number of written volumes, containing the rules and the spells of Ephesian magic in the Apostles' days. We shall find that the text suggests great principles of the most practical bearing upon the Christian life of every man, in every time and place. And perhaps, in one view of it, the text suggests to us something of Christian duty and safety, in these days of cheap and abundant literature, when books of the most various character and tendency are brought within the easy reach of all. It is fit, that in entering upon such a subject, with the simple desire to set before you certain thoughts which may prove true and safe, in a matter as to which good Christians are found to differ, we should pray for the guidance of the Blessed Spirit of all truth, to lead us into that truth which is His own.

And first, as to the circumstances. St Paul had come to the great city of Ephesus; and had for a considerable time preached the gospel there. All over the East, the arts of magic and jugglery were much practised. It is known to many of you, that in India, to the present day, men are found who perform feats which impress strangers as most extraordi-

nary and inexplicable: so much so, that good missionaries, sharp and enlightened, have quite lately declared their belief that these men are possessed of more than human power. But Ephesus, in old days, was the head-quarters of such arts, and of the people that practised them. Certain arrangements of words, written on parchment and worn, or pronounced in peculiar tones of voice, were believed to have a magical virtue: and were known far and wide under the name of the *Ephesian Letters*. Now, in this capital city of spurious miracles, we find that God vouchsafed a special manifestation of true miraculous power: as though to appeal to a people through the agency most likely to impress them. We are told that special miracles were wrought by the hands of Paul. We are told that miraculous cures of diseases were produced by little articles of dress, which had once been worn by him. Nothing like these things had ever been done by the wizards and jugglers of Ephesus: and all the city was much moved. But this impression was deepened by what came next. There were seven brothers, who pretended to be able to cast out evil spirits: and these men, upon one occasion, had the hardihood to use the Saviour's Name in their pretended spell. But that blessed Name, from their sinful lips, had a power to infuriate the evil spirit, not to cast it out: and with the extraordinary strength and ferocity of the demoniac, the possessed man assailed the exorcists; and that so

savagely that the seven brothers, in terrible fear, fled from the house, naked and wounded.

Great fear followed. The name of our Lord was magnified: and a host of converts was made. And among these newly-made believers, there were certain who up to this time had been professors of magic. One of the first things they did, in the warmth of their early zeal, was to bring together the books which contained the rules of their curious arts, and to publicly burn them: thus openly and finally repudiating that which doubtless had formerly been their pride. So precious were these books, in those days when the rapid multiplying power of the printing press was unknown, and when all books were laboriously written by the hand of scribes, that when the price of them was reckoned up, it was found to be no less than fifty thousand pieces of silver. We do not know the precise coin which is so called: thus we cannot say how much all this was of our money. But from the mention made of it, it was plainly a great sacrifice that these Ephesian converts made. No doubt, a wise man would have said, that all their magical books were so much worthless rubbish: but then, as now, the value of a thing was (in one sense) the money you could get for it: and there would be many ignorant heathens only too willing to buy, at a great price, the volumes which, as they fancied, could tell them how to escape disease and

danger, and how to constrain powerful spirits to obey their commands.

Now the first truth which we draw from this story of the burning of the curious books by those Ephesian Christians, is this: that it is a great test of a man's being really converted to God, if you find him willing to give up his besetting sin: to cut off that particular sinful indulgence which in his unconverted days he was most given to. The story suggests to us that truth: and reminds us of a searching test of the reality of our own religious profession. You know there is nothing which the New Testament declares more plainly and strongly than this: that "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away, and all things are become new." In many places in God's Word it is pressed upon us, how great a change in views and feelings, and how great a change in the appreciation of a multitude of things, passes upon the regenerated and converted soul. And probably in no respect is a greater change experienced, than in the converted man's feeling towards sin, and towards his own sin. Formerly, sin did not seem so very bad, after all was said that could be said: and his own personal sins seemed the most pardonable of all: quite peculiar, not like other men's, with a hundred things to be said in excuse and palliation. But to the man convinced by the Holy Spirit, how different all this is: how black and evil all sin against God seems, and how

inexcusably bad his own! He understands now the force of that singularly sounding addition to the Psalmist's prayer for forgiveness: the "Pardon mine iniquity, *for it is great!*" A singular statement: not tending to show the request small, and easily granted; but large, and hard to grant! Just the opposite of man's usual way of asking a favour. Yes, when truly convinced by the Blessed Spirit, the soul's tendency is rather to run into the opposite extreme from the natural one; and to think that never were sins so aggravated as his, and never sinner so bad as he. And if there be some sin in which he had deeply offended, oh with what loathing he turns away from that! Now, brethren, mark how uniform Christian experience keeps, age after age. With these Ephesians, so long since, it was as I trust it has been with each of you. Their special sin had been in their practice of those unholy arts of magic. Likely enough, all their necromancy and their enchantments had been mere imposition: but they had all the will, if they lacked the power, to violate the awful repose of the dead, and to seek the aid of wretched and sinful spirits. And so, when they were converted to God, they saw the evil of their special sin, and they cut off *that*. They gathered the volumes, once so prized, that contained the rules and mysteries of their evil craft; and they gave them to the flames. My friends, you may not be able to fix the day, and to explain the manner, of your conversion. You may be of their

number, very few indeed if one may judge by our observation of life, in whom the baptism with water was accompanied, as we always pray it might, with the better baptism of the Holy Spirit: but besides this, though you know and feel that whereas you were blind, now you see, you may not be able to say the how and when. But, are your views of sin changed; and especially of your own sin? And if there were some form of guilt which you know used to be specially yours,—some habit of thought or feeling, some manner of speech, some course of conduct,—have you earnestly, by the Holy Spirit's help, cast *that* away,—cast it away, though it were like plucking out the right eye? Was worldliness your special sin: then have you earnestly sought the faith that overcomes the world? Or were there grosser stains upon your life; and have you crucified the flesh? Was it the desire of pre-eminence, with its train of envyings, backbitings, and discontents: and have you, in God's strength, so far as it may be, put that enemy of you and of your Master, down? If all this be in any good measure so, then thank God for it! You have strong reason to believe that you are a converted and regenerated soul. You have like reason for believing *that*, as they in old days had, those hearty energetic believers, who, when they had believed in Christ, brought together their precious books of curious arts, and "burned them before all men!"

The second lesson suggested by the conduct of

these Ephesian converts, is a very simple and obvious one, but none the less valuable for that: it is this; that it is a wise thing for a Christian to keep out of the way of temptation. Not only was the effectual destruction of those magical volumes a test of the reality of the conversion of those men: it was more. It was a wise precaution against future danger. If they had kept the books, laying them aside in some safe receptacle, they might now and then out of curiosity have referred to them. Sometimes, in a leisure hour, or on a rainy day, they might have thought to themselves, Now it will be curious to have another look at those wicked old books which we once used to value so much. And thus, you can see, those Ephesian converts might have gradually been drawn back again into their old evil ways. Now, they prudently made *that* impossible. Whatever sin they might fall into in days to come, it would assuredly not be the sin of consulting those books which years before had ended in air and ashes. There would not even be a smoked volume, pulled out of the fire after half its leaves were gone: the destruction was effectual. My friends, is there not a lesson here for us? You know, our blessed Lord himself recognised, and that heartily, the soundness of the course: yea, He embodied His approval of it in words familiar on every Christian's lips as household words: "Lead us not into temptation!" No Christian should wilfully go into temptation. No Christian should wilfully miss an opportunity

of removing temptation from his eyes, his hands, his heart. We should distrust ourselves, brethren. "He that trusteth in his own heart," the wise man said, "is a fool." We do not know what slumbering evil is within us: or what, save for the restraint and guards of God's Holy Spirit, we might have been,—yea, may yet be! A man is very silly who runs into needless danger: fool-hardiness is not courage. But a man is worse than silly who exposes himself to temptation which he can rightly avoid. For the temptation which meets us in the way where God bids us go, and for the resisting of *it*, we may expect the promised help and grace of the Holy Ghost; and of many lesser yet powerful spirits. "He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee *in all thy ways.*" Yes, in all our ways: in the way which God appoints to be ours: not in perilous ways into which we have presumed, and which were never meant to be ours.

My friends, your old temptation, whatever it was, do you thus keep out of the way of it? You know the things that tended most powerfully to lead you wrong. You know the temptation that was most congenial to your sinful heart and nature. There is nothing whatsoever of which I am more sure, than that it was not to the practising of the occult arts of magic: yet you may very fitly be asked, Have you burnt your magical books? Get beyond the mere detail of what the Ephesians did; and look to its

great principle. You know the kind of people that it did you spiritual harm to associate with. You know the kind of books that it did you harm to read. You know the moral atmosphere that you found spiritually unwholesome: now, do you keep out of that? Worldly society made you worldly. You came back from gay scenes, that drowned you in forgetfulness of the solemn truths of time and eternity, with no heart for prayer, or for God's Word. Do you now shun those things that you know did you harm before? Do you keep out of spiritual harm's way: do you shun the atmosphere that is laden with spiritual languor and infection? If you fail to do these things, then you are not so wise as were those good men at Ephesus long ago, who, when convinced that the use of curious arts had been their great sin, and that in *that* way lay their great temptation, brought together the books that contained the rules of those arts, and "burned them before all men!"

All this we have said, looking at the conduct of those Ephesian converts simply in the light of a giving up and a cutting off of what had been their peculiar and besetting sin. But it may be interesting and profitable to seek to apply these truths and lessons to something more specially analogous to the things which the Ephesians had found a temptation and a peril. It was in wicked and mischievous books that those ancient Christians found a special danger: and

you see the effectual means they took to rid themselves of that danger. They burnt the mischievous books. Thus they testified their detestation of them. And thus they made sure that those books should do no more harm, either to their former owners, or to any one else.

Now, we have what may be called our magical books. They are not treatises on necromantic arts. Such treatises would not, at this time of day, be likely to do any of us any harm. But we have books quite as mischievous as any of those by whose help the old Ephesian ever held commerce, or thought he held commerce, with the dark powers of evil. And our magical books are not so easily got rid of. It would make a tremendous blaze were we to bring *them* together and burn them. And they are not in the hands of a limited class of society: expensive and rare volumes, such as only the rich can afford to buy. They are multiplied beyond numbering by the printing-press, that engine so mighty for good or evil. They are cheap: all the cheaper that their evil makes the demand for them great. They are scattered everywhere: not merely in the library of the scholar, in a language which only the learned can read; but on the schoolboy's shelf, in the artisan's locker, in the maidservant's chest, as well as on the drawing-room table. And when I say this, brethren, I am not thinking of that vile and loathsome literature which is too common: which floods the workshops of our large cities, and

pollutes the mind of multitudes among the uneducated. I am not thinking of mischievous books which do all the less harm, because their coarseness and malignant stupidity are sure to revolt all but the rudest and least cultivated. No, brethren: I am thinking of a far higher class of literature, and far more dangerous. I am thinking of books whose literary graces and beauties are the highest: but whose moral tone is of the lowest. How woeful to think, in how many cases, genius and eloquence, those excellent gifts of God, given for high and pure designs, have been used to make sin more interesting and seductive: to confound the grand and broad distinctions between right and wrong: to bring religion and religious people into contempt: and to make the young mind familiar with an order of thought and feeling which is to the soul what the deadly malaria is to the body! I know quite well what may be said, as to our ideas of propriety being artificial and conventional: as to other ages having had different ways of thinking on such matters from those which we have: and no doubt there is a measure of truth in all that. But it will be admitted by all who are moderately conversant with the books in our own language, and yet more with those in various other languages; that a very great deal of the thought which has been produced by the greatest geniuses this world has seen, has a taint about it, that stamps it such that no wise man would suffer it to be read by any in whose heart he de-

sired to preserve the purity which is one of the best fruits of God's Holy Spirit either in man or woman: that stamps it such that, read in the light of the New Testament, its genius seems rather the lurid flame from the pit, than the healthful breezy sunshine of the moral world, the worthy emanation from the Father of lights. And there are many books which, though free from a directly immoral character and tendency, are yet most mischievous: which foster such morbid feelings, and present such unreal views of life, and so enervate the whole moral being,—and to this order may be referred a very great part of all the works of fiction that have ever been written,—that you might as well expect a hardy forest-tree to retain health and vigour in the sickly climate of a hot-house, as the youthful soul, the young woman or lad, brought up on a course of such reading, to evince the healthy, hearty, sound spirit of the disciple of Him whose prayer was that His people might be sanctified by God's truth, and not stunted by mawkish sentimentalism, and a whole climate of unreality.

Now, in these days, wherein books are abundant and cheap as they never were before; wherein some knowledge of the more remarkable volumes that issue from the press is needful to all who would join intelligently in the conversation of ordinary society: it becomes an important question, What is the duty of the true Christian in this matter? And it seems to me that we may find something to guide us in the

text. We are to be guided by its spirit, of course; not by its letter. In old days, men made sure that the bad books they had, would do no more harm to anybody, by burning them. The books could not then be replaced. The destruction now of one copy of a mischievous book, out of an edition of possibly many thousands, would have not the least effect upon the book's circulation. And, as an indication of your disapproval of the book, the burning, if done "before all men" like that at Ephesus, might have just the contrary effect from that which you desire. An injudicious Head of a certain College publicly burnt a book written by an eminent member of that College. The book was indeed a most dangerous though a most eloquent one. And the Head of that College, in his wonderful ignorance of human nature, thought that the students under his charge would be effectually deterred from reading a volume of which he had thus significantly expressed his reprobation. Why, you will not be surprised to hear, that every copy of the book in that ancient city was bought by students that afternoon; and hundreds of lads read it who would otherwise never have looked at it. And when, not long ago, a certain sceptical, but most heavy and unreadable, volume was publicly condemned by the dignitaries of the Anglican Church, this public condemnation did but serve to puff that book into tenfold circulation and influence. For, publicly to signify that a book is bad and dangerous,

is the very thing to awaken curiosity about it, and gain readers for it. I venture to believe, that were an authoritative list published of books which no respectable person ought to read, these books would, by multitudes, be more sought after than any others.

And thus, the Christian feels a certain difficulty as to these magical books. He would willingly burn them: but he sees that to do so, would only give them greater notoriety. Yet this rule may be confidently laid down: that books, however brilliant, which directly tend to evil, ought not to be read by us, or permitted to those over whom we have any authority. No matter how clever, eloquent, or interesting, these books should be put under a ban. Though some deadly poison were the most pleasant of drinks, you would not drink it yourself, nor give it to your children. So be it, likewise, with the poison that poisons the soul.

So far it is plain. But, beyond this, comes a realm of difficulty. I have heard a good, but very narrow and stupid person say, that you should never read on any day a book which might not be properly read on the Lord's day. And that person's idea of what might be read on the Lord's day, was what may (without offence) be called the old Scotch one. I need not tell any one here, that *that* is childish folly. To read none but religious books, would not have a wholesome effect on our religious character. Many books, not directly religious in their subject or treat-

ment, have yet a decidedly good tendency: and every good tendency in this world tends at the last to Christ, and to the holiness which is wrought by the Blessed Spirit. And books which have no special moral aim do yet oftentimes, by the noble thoughts and views they suggest, and by the sublime and pathetic emotions they awaken, enlarge and ennoble the mind,—widen its sympathies,. lift it up into a kindliness and brotherly spirit which is of the very essence of our holy religion. No one here need be told that poetry and fiction,—that the very lightest of the productions of the airy imagination,—may, used not in excess, serve great and right ends in the way of mental refreshment,—preparing the soul to return with the greater animation and vigour to graver duties, and more serious trains of thought. The soul needs its seasons of rest and refreshment as well as the body; and many hard-wrought Christians can testify what profit as well as pleasure they have derived from that literature which is sometimes disparagingly called light: yet to whose production some of the noblest human minds have given their best labours.

It seems to me that there are few things which do more to dwarf and degrade the understanding and the heart, than that thing which some good people do: namely, to forbid to themselves and those whom they can influence, all books and publications which do not sound their own peculiar shibboleth, and

advocate their own peculiar crotchets. There are some Protestants who vehemently condemn the Church of Rome for having its Index of prohibited books, forbidden to be read by its members; who, if they could, would have their Index too, and put in it all books written by Christians beyond their own Church or sect,—or even by Christians beyond their own little school within their Church or sect. And as you know, brethren, it is the way of the New Testament not to deal in minute details, but to give us broad principles, and let us apply them for ourselves. It seems to me to be so here, in the case of the lesson as to the use of books which we may draw from the wise conduct of those converts at Ephesus, long ago. We cannot construct from it a list of books forbidden and books permitted. But we *can* draw from it this practical lesson: that we ought, before God, to shun all those books which we feel do us spiritual harm. Those books, for whose perusal we feel more worldly and less charitable: those books, which tend away from Christ and truth: those let us shun. But those books from which we rise with a kinder heart to all our brethren in sin and sorrow: those books from which we rise feeling more generous, hopeful, and energetic: those books which lift us above the little selfish interests of our daily life, or teach us to go through these in a more earnest, truthful spirit: those books let us read and profit by, though they may make no formal parade of

religion; feeling assured that such books are religious books, in a very true and real sense. And those volumes, yet more to be valued, on whose pages the Blessed Spirit seems to have breathed: those books, begun, continued, and ended, with many prayers that God would use them to bless immortal souls, and comfort, and convert: those let us read with the like prayer with which they were written. Need it be said, that there is one Book more: one, worth all the rest that ever were written: the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God: whose sentences are hallowed to our hearts as no other ever can be: whose sentences were the earliest taught us, and will be the last upon our lips when we die: happiest prayer, and sublimest praise, and best direction, and tenderest consolation: the only words to utter by the dying bed: the best to utter over the green grave: with its breaths from the days departed,—with the Saviour's teachings breathing from it fresh as when spoken, and the Saviour's face looking out from its pages still, and the promise of the Holy Ghost to explain and apply it: oh let that best Book be morning and evening read and studied,—with the earnest petition taught us by our Lord Himself, "Sanctify us through Thy truth: Thy word is truth!"

XX.

THE WORLD TO COME.

"The world to come."—HEB. vi. 5.

I LOOK around me: and I am aware of the existence of a vast incalculable number of things apart from myself. I see land and ocean: I see trees, houses, fields, men: rivers and mountains: cities and country tracts. Then I am told that what I see, or ever have seen, of such things as these, is nothing to what exists of them beyond my view. I read of wide and lonely oceans, over which you might sail on week after week, seeing everywhere the undulating eternity of waters. I read of vast sandy deserts, stretching, brown and bare, away to the horizon: of thick primeval forests, mounting up the hills and clothing the valleys for hundreds of miles together: of wide ice-bound realms of cold and darkness, where the frozen sea stretches away into gloom. I am told of vast incalculable numbers of human beings, white and black, civilised and savage, dwelling in every conceivable different kind of scene, and in every possible different mode of life: each individual in all that countless host having a soul something like

our own. And I know that all this tremendous aggregate of scenes and things and men, of feelings and concerns and cares, is denoted by one short but comprehensive word: We call it all *This World.*

You look back over the years you have lived, and you find that the sum of your knowledge, drawn from sense, is all confined within the range of this array of scenes, people, and cares. You can remember nothing else than this world. I suppose none of you remember to have lived anywhere else; though there have been moments in which there seemed to come dim echoes of a pre-existence elsewhere: but all our distinct remembrance of what we have seen and felt, is gathered within this compass. The whole array of the things you have known and felt: the people you have known and cared for: all have been contained within this horizon. You never knew anybody who had come from any other world. Tidings come from the remotest corner of this earth: Not a whisper or a breath from any other world: If there be another world, it is as silent and as signless as though it were not at all.

Yet we are told that far away,—parted by a different kind of severance altogether than that space which divides from the stars, which are all counted in this world as we now use the phrase,—there *is* another world. We cannot map out its continents and countries: we do not know by what names its different regions are called among the people that

live in it. We cannot see it: we cannot make out the dimmest trace of it: we cannot tell you whereabout it lies: we never saw any one who had been there: and we believe earnestly that there is such a world, because we have been told so by One of Whom we can see and hear as little as of itself. We call it *The world to come.*

The entire structure of our religious beliefs, is founded on our faith that there is such a world; and that we, when in God's time we go from this, go There. Every one we ever knew, that year by year has dropt off in death,—and how many they are,—is living There: and every soul of all the countless millions that ever died: What a vast population! Here is the subject we are to think of, earnestly, today: not to learn anything we did not know before; but praying that God's Holy Spirit may make us realise all this. What we want is to feel that there is another world, and a life there that will never end: and the two tremendous contrasts of good and evil, of happiness and misery, in that awful life into which each of you must enter some day. Soberly, we ought never to forget the world to come. There is not a thing here, about us or within us, that ought not to be influenced by the world and the life to come. We cannot tell, we cannot imagine, what like this world and our life here would be, if there were not a world to come.

Think, first, of the Reality of that world. Let us

not vaguely fancy that because we cannot see it and touch it, it is a less real thing than those things which we can see and touch. It is our natural tendency to think thus: to do a thing which the New Testament would call Walking by sight and not by faith. We think to ourselves,—Now here is this world: There is no mistake about it: it is a world of Realities: It is not a dream or a fancy. There is no mistake about its possessions and gains: there is no mistake about its sorrows: It has much evil about it,—many drawbacks; but it is at all events a solid substantial thing. But how different with the world to come! Show us, we can imagine an unbeliever saying to us,—Show us this world to come! Where-away lies it: What-like is it: What-like life do they live there? Show us, ever so faint and dimly traced upon the far horizon, the distant gleam of that Golden City's battlements to which you say your footsteps are tending,—or even the cloud-like looming of the undiscovered country whither they have gone that left us! Ah, how misty a thing,—how blank a thing,—how absolutely nothing,—does the world to come seem to the eye of sense! Not one trace of it on land or sea: not one whisper ever fell upon the ear of all its voices: All we know of it is that it is somewhere: and this we know only because we have been told it by a Being of Whom we can see and hear as little as of itself. Yet the very foundation of our religion lies in faith to believe in the existence of this other world. "We walk by

faith, not by sight," as concerns everything about our life that rises above the mere supply of the wants that begin and end here. If we could see it,—if we could look, only for a moment, on those mysterious scenes,—we surely should live all our life as those who must leave all this and go there. But God has appointed that it shall not be so. We must do without any such help. What can we do but pray, "Lord, increase our faith!" Oh for faith to realise and bring it home to us, how real are the things which are unseen! I do not care that I can grasp and hold the things of this world, while those of the other elude my touch and feeling: I *know* the other world is the solider reality of the two. I do not care that I never heard a whisper from the other world: I *know* the dulness is in myself, if no echo of its multitudinous music comes to my ear across the breathless space between. I do not care that I never saw one of the shining ones that dwell in the land of light, among whom there are many we knew. For God knows we must sometimes feel it, as our life here fleets away, and all we care for changes with the process of the rapid years,—that

> All, all on earth is shadow: all beyond
> Is substance: the reverse is folly's creed.

Next, of the Influence of the world to come. How does it affect us here?—It is quite plain that knowing there is such a world before us, we cannot possibly go on just as if there were not. I do not mean to say

but that a great many people do that. But, looking just at the common sense of the case, it is perfectly certain that they ought not. If there were no world but this, just see what we should have to do. Why, I suppose, just to get on through life with as little worry and as much enjoyment as possible. I do not think, indeed, that any one but a fool would say that if there were no world to come, we might do just as much wrong as we chose, if only we could get gain or pleasure by it: because conscience (and there is such a thing, wherever it came from) makes a bad man unhappy, and vice spoils the purest enjoyments of this life: a course of vicious indulgence, if it did nothing more, brings a man's liking to that tone, that he can feel no relish for innocent, simple, spontaneous joys: and by being honest, kind, and temperate, a man would make the best even of this world. But if there were no world to come, a human being would have done the work of life when he had supported himself creditably by his industry, surrounded himself with home comforts, and generally made himself a decent member of society. Now as things are, this is not so. We are here in this world, at the longest, for some seventy or eighty years: in the next world we are to live for ever; so there is no proportion between the two lives. And then, while this life is chequered with sorrow and joy,—some bitter drops in the brightest lot, and some relief in the gloomiest,—in the next world there is no middle state,—there are only life

and good, and death and evil. This life, make the most of it, is no more than the porch that leads to a mighty palace. It would be plain to common sense, even if God's Word had not told us, that the thing we have to do here, is to prepare for the next life. Our time here is a sowing-time. Thank God, in faithfully doing our work, day by day,—and reasonably enjoying what things are given us to enjoy here,—we *are* preparing for the other life. But, if it were needful,—and some found it so,—out of the long existence before us we might spare even the threescore years and ten to labour and self-denial, waiting for peace and rest elsewhere. The feeling that should be uppermost in every man's mind, through all the hours of the day,—here it is: Now I am to go to another world after I leave this: There I am to live always: Here I must do nothing which will harm me in that long life; Here I must miss doing nothing which may make me and mine better There. And so, the world to come gives our being here an aim and a purpose;—gives us something worth working for,—something worth denying ourselves for. You who are boys or lads, think of this: Suppose any of you were going away to Australia; and had just a month given you to prepare: Would you not feel that in that month you must set yourselves busily to the task of making ready for your sojourn in that strange land? Well, even so, you and I are here now: we are going,—in far less than a month it may be,—not to another country for a few

years, but to another world for ever: Is it not plain that the great thing we have to do, in the weeks or days, or it may be only hours, before we depart on that solitary journey, is to be preparing for that other world,—doing whatever God has told us is the right preparation for that other world? It is no matter how the practice of all of us may go against this truth: no matter though thousands live and die without one earnest endeavour to prepare in this world for the next: no matter though even professed Christians give the best of their time and energy to this life, and cast aside the preparation for eternity into any odd nook or corner: I put it to you as rational souls, if it be not true, that the great imperative thing which we have every one of us to do in this world,—the thing we had better never have been born than neglect,—is to prepare for the world to come!

Then, in the third place: What must we do to prepare for this coming world? This is the great question. There is many a thing men spend their time and energy in discussing, that has not the weight of a feather when compared with this inquiry: What am I to do in this world to make sure that it be well with me in the world to come?

Now you see this is a personal question: The question is What we, and our children, and the people we care for, living in this July of 1875, and here in Fife in Scotland, have got to do. Because men, in

ages past, and in countries far away, have tried diverse ways of making sure here, that it should be well with them beyond the grave: have tried these ways with an awful earnestness, that shunned no labour, no privation, no torture. They strove blindly, and in the dark, for it had pleased God they should not have light as we have. It is a story that is like to break one's heart: but I will not believe that such earnestness ever went for nothing,—or that the merciful God ever required of His poor creatures what He had Himself made sure they should not have to give Him: I cast no doubt on the salvation, only for Christ's sake, of those who were not allowed to hear of Christ, but who stretched weary hands and wistful eyes through the gloom towards the Desire of all nations, and prayed in their anguish to all the God they knew. But it is different with us. The Gospel light is round us: the way is marked out for us: there can be no question what we are required to do. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." That is all: but no doubt it implies a great deal. That it be well with us, specially in the other world, is the same thing which in God's communications with men is called Salvation. And so the question comes to be, What is the very thing that is meant by believing on Christ, when you and I are told so to do?

I think, I am sure, that if most of us were sharply examined even in a subject we fancy we fairly know, the result would be humbling to us. A great deal of

our knowledge is very vague, very misty: and that would come out. Is it so with any of us, in regard to this great concern of the way of salvation? We must have a clear idea as to what is meant by saving faith in the Redeemer. Let us try to make that plain. To believe in Christ means that you put your trust in Him for salvation. It means that you are deeply convinced of sin; that you discover no method of escape but through a crucified Saviour; and that you go with your load of guilt and anguish, and cast yourself down at His feet. It means that you renounce all self-dependence; that you abandon every earthly stay; and fly to Christ as your only hope. It means that you place your entire reliance upon His atoning sacrifice, and His perfect righteousness: that you unreservedly surrender your soul, with its immortal interests, into His hands: and that, believing His promises, and seeking by the help of the Holy Ghost to obey His commands, you look forward, through Him alone, to eternal peace. Now, *that* is saving faith. *That* is what we have to do, that it may be well with us entering the world to come. We cannot, indeed, do this by ourselves. We need the Blessed Spirit to help us. But there is no hardship in this: for we have but heartily to ask His help, and it comes. There is not a blessing any of you can ask in prayer, and be so sure it will come to you if you really desire it, as the help of the Holy Spirit.

Such is saving faith. I have wished, in explaining

it, to keep clear, as far as might be, of any of that popular imagery which may indeed convey to some minds a vivid idea, but which seems likely to convey to many an idea which is material, which is inadequate, which is not taught in the New Testament. To "get behind the Blood,"—to get life by a look, it seems a momentary look, at the Crucified One,—is all true in a sense: but one has known such imagery taken up in a sense in which it is not true. And it cannot be too strongly impressed upon you, that no single act of the soul, however earnest,—no laying hold of salvation for once, though done with ever so warm and sincere feeling,—is to be relied on as a ground of the good hope through grace, unless in our daily life we are habitually choosing good and avoiding evil: unless our faith be proved to be the right faith by this, that it purifies the heart, and works by love, and overcomes the world. The fruits of the Spirit's indwelling are plainly to be seen: they are a good, pure, kind, honest, unselfish life. "The works of the flesh are manifest:" and they prove that the Spirit is not there. We come back, for the practical test of any man's profession, just to that plain truth, understandable by all of us from childhood, that there is an eternal difference between Right and Wrong; and that God requires us to do Right. If, by God's kind grace; if, from grateful love to Him Who died for us; if, by hourly prayer; we are living a holy life, and striving to put down in us the abounding evil:

then we may humbly trust that we are free of God's universe, seen and unseen;—of this world and of that which is to come.

God lead each of us so to repent, so to believe, so to live, that ours may be that good hope.

And if we had it, firmly and really, as some have had it among God's children: if we could feel how near the other world is, and how it is the Home of the best we have known, who, though beyond all converse with us now, are still one with us in the Communion of Saints: think how that would brighten our life here: how it would set right much that in this world seems wrong. Even as it is, our faith is weak, no doubt; yet it is so far real, that most Christian people many times in every day refer in their minds if not in their talk to the other world: more than you would think are held up, by that frequent reference, to plod on the pilgrimage somehow, to recal with calmness the voice and the face that are gone, to bear with some patience things in their own lot under which otherwise they might burst out into despair, but which are now dismissed with a weary sigh. Yes: the other world has a very real influence: and we many times have wondered how those lived who had not our hope: how they lay down to die: how they bade those they left behind them farewell: how they lived on when those dearest to them died. It is not natural,

it does not seem to be God's purpose, that in the common course of our life there should be more than the latent reference, never absent, to the last change, and where that must take us. But in more special experiences, under greater than ordinary pressure, the grand hope of Immortality brought to light by Jesus Christ should surely spring up into vivid life within us, and bring its real and strong consolation. We are called to suffer: we are disappointed: life is not as we had hoped. Well, it is but for a time: and then comes a life where is no more pain nor failure: The cloud must blow by. That is true: Might we not seek faith to feel it more? And further. We know, though we put it away, and try to forget it: but we know, it is always in the second plane of our memory, every day when we are going about doing our work, and conversing with those dearest to us, that the day must come when one or other must see the other dead. Over all our intercourse with those we love, broods the shadow of parting. We may keep together in this world, brother and brother, parent and child; though oftenest not even *that* can be, in these days: but there is a great and utter separation that must come. Here is the bitterness of death: a bitterness that would kill all but the most ignoble, if there were no world to come. It touches the heart, even yet, the picture of that little household, the children that filled one home with their merriment, and said their prayers at one mother's knee,—

scattered over this world by the necessities of life, and dying at last far asunder: it touches our heart, because the thing comes so home to us, and is so true to our own experience; but it would break it, if there were not a world to come. The homeliest words, and the longest remembered, are the best to tell what we look for, through Him Who is the Resurrection and the Life.

A few short years of evil past, we reach the happy shore,
Where death-divided friends at last, shall meet to part no more.

Do you not feel it strange, to look round this church to-day; and then try to bring home the great thought which I have in my sermon been seeking to enforce, that there is another world and that we are surely going There? Here we are met, now, in a place we all know well: but strange to think how far away we shall some day meet again, in a new untried world, and ourselves so changed! Yet, before we part, some perhaps never to meet under that roof again, we may kindly pray, each for all the others, that when we meet again, as we shall meet, far away, it may be in that blessed region of the world to come, which is the Country Christ's pilgrims have sought through all these ages, the Golden City where He is seen as He is and those who see Him are happy: where sin and suffering and parting are past: where there is no more death, neither sorrow nor crying; neither any more pain!

XXI.

OUR SPIRITUAL OBLIGATIONS.

"Other men laboured; and ye are entered into their labours."
—JOHN iv. 38.

"THE memory of the just," says God's Word, "is blessed." The memory of those to whom we owe much, ought to be dear. Let this hour be to us, here assembled, one of special remembrance of certain Benefactors whom we ought never to forget. Let us think, this afternoon, of how much we owe to some whose names do not come very ready to our lips, and whose great services we are by far too apt to suffer to escape from our heart and our memory. We keep the anniversaries of no saints, at least by any recognition in the public services of our Church, in this country: but it is not therefore to be imagined that gratitude to the best benefactors is a chilly feeling with us. And when I invite you, now, to grateful remembrance of some of those spiritual blessings and privileges which have come to us from God, the Giver of all good, through the intervention of human instruments, I am well assured of the sympathy of every one of you.

The statement, contained in my text, and addressed by our Saviour to His disciples, with a first and immediate reference to that work which they were to do, of evangelising the world, though expressed in words restricting it as at first spoken to a single case, has all the force and universal truthfulness of a general principle. If it was true, and it *was* true, that the disciples of Jesus reaped that on which they had bestowed no labour,—that other men laboured, and the fruit of the toil of others was gathered by them: with equal truth may the same thing be said as to that generation which now overspreads Britain, and as to us who are gathered to-day within these walls. It seems to be a plan of our heavenly Father, running through all His government of His universe, that men in one place and one time shall labour to produce effects, the benefit of which is to be enjoyed by other men, in other times and perhaps in other places. Why, brethren, the soil we tread on is the result of the labour of past generations of human beings: it is because "other men laboured, and we have entered into labours" in which we bore no part, that instead of our living now in a country overspread with wild forests, and impassable for boundless marshes, as this country once was, we inhabit a land of grassy uplands, rich corn-fields, and trim woods; of health, and wealth, and beauty. It is because "other men laboured, and we are entered into their labours," that the

climate which now overhangs Britain is so different a thing from that which our ancient forefathers breathed and lived in: it is on account of their labours in improving the soil, that the winters are so much shorter than they used to be two thousand years ago: the December cold so much less rigorous, and the July heat so much less parching and overpowering. You see, so universal is the law contained in the words of Christ, that even as regards those matters which we consider as forming the very conditions of our being;—even in regard of the earth we tread on and the air we breathe;—the summer heat that relaxes, and the winter cold that braces or that numbs;—"other men laboured, and we are entered into their labours." You cannot exist in this country now-a-days, without deriving some help from dead hands: without incurring obligation to men who are departed. It is because of toils undergone in days while as yet we laboured not, felt not, knew not, were not,—that when we go forth to our evening walk, the beaten path makes it easy; and the pure uninfected breeze fans our brow; and the wolf follows not upon our track: it is because of the labour of dead hands that the hills are green to their summit; that the rivers flow in their proper beds; that ripening crops go down to the margin of the sea. We cannot draw a breath: we cannot walk a step: we cannot look upon a prospect, without entering into the labours of other men.

And, indeed, the more we think of it, the more

plainly we see, that even as regards the present life and the present world, men are linked together by ties of mutual obligation and mutual dependence. If in regard to temporal interests every man had to begin afresh, instead of starting, as it were, from a point to which he was carried by others; there would be little progress indeed. It is just because each successive generation gets on a little way, by the help of that which preceded it, that this age is more civilised than that of Alfred. For almost every comfort and convenience of our modern life, we are indebted to others. You need not be reminded of what we owe, every one of us, to the labours of James Watt and George Stephenson: how in every visit to distant friends, cheapened, and made easy, and in the case of numbers made possible, by their great inventions, we are entering into the result and advantage of labours which we did not go through. You know how every man that goes to America follows in the wake of Columbus, and enters, without an effort, into the advantage of all his sleepless nights, and laborious calculations, and spirit-breaking repulses, and hours of agonising suspense as the grand discovery drew closer and closer. You know how we owe something to one man for our dwellings: to another for our clothing: to another for our safety from the thunderbolt: to another for that wonderful luxury of civilisation, the opportunity of cheap and rapid communication with parted friends: to another

for our smooth roads: to another for our swift steamships. You know what labours on the part of men who are gone, secured our civil and religious liberties? and what long hours of toil have gone to the production of the books in which we find solace and cheer. It would be easy to extend the catalogue to any length; and to point to every item in an almost endless list of the temporal benefactors of our race, as another instance in which the Saviour's words would apply;—in which "other men laboured, and we are entered into their labours."

But surely, upon this holy day, and being assembled in the house of prayer, it should be profitable and interesting to turn away from these temporal gains, to services rendered us by other men, which entail upon us infinitely weightier obligation: to labours undergone by others and entered into by us, of greater value a thousand-fold than all the temporal services which have ranked those who rendered them among the best benefactors of the race. Let us seek to take as comprehensive a view as may be within the limits of a single discourse, of those spiritual and religious blessings and advantages for which, under God, we are indebted to "other men."

And first, look at your Bibles. How easy it is for you and me to get at God's mind upon any subject that vitally concerns our most important interests! There it is, the volume lying before you: translated into your own language: to be had at a price so

cheap that the very poorest among us need not want a Bible if he wishes one: with not a page from beginning to end, but what is waiting for your eye. Morning and evening you take your Bible from its place; and you turn to the passage next in order: and you read it, asking the Blessed and Holy Spirit,—the best of all commentators,—to shed a light upon it, and help you to understand and (what is better) to *feel* its meaning: and do you ever think, when thus you have God's Word so ready at hand, what labour it cost on the part of other men to bring things to this point, that your Bible lies there in your pew, or lies upon your table at home? Does it ever strike you, how hard other men must have laboured, before it came to this? There was a vast deal to be done, before things came to be so, that at any time, when you desire to learn what is the mind and will of God, you have just to open your Bible! Think of the toil of those who sought out the manuscripts from the dusty archives of convent and cathedral; and compared and collated old parchments by hundreds to get the very words of inspiration; and then drew forth from the dead, unspoken language (that spring shut up, that fountain sealed) the clear stream of pure English which it is so easy for us to read. It would profit you little enough, when you wanted to find the way of salvation, to have an ancient, time-stained parchment put into your hands, and to be told that *there*, in those unknown hieroglyphics, in that scroll mean-

ingless to you as the handwriting on the wall, you had the revelation of God's will as to the way in which you might escape woe and gain holiness and happiness. *That* would be a revelation that would need to be revealed again: and how much, then, do we owe to those through whose labours it has come to pass, that that illegible manuscript has been changed into the clearly-printed and easily-read pages which I have before me now? Have not we, in very truth, entered into their labours? Does not each man and each child here, who shall read to-night his evening chapter of the Bible, enjoy all the benefit of the long studies of Hebrew, Chaldee, Arabic, Syriac, Coptic, and Greek, that fitted the translators of the Bible for their task: and enter too into the fruit of all the anxious laborious days and nights, of critical investigation, and minute analysis, and careful comparison of scripture with scripture, through which, page by page, and verse by verse, they drew out, and set down here, God's revealed will for man's salvation? And the labours into which we enter, every time we read the Scriptures, are not summed when we have thought only of the toil which drew them from their first garb in a foreign tongue. We must add to that, all that has been done by those who argued, suffered, and died, to win for us our prerogative, enjoyed by every soul in Britain, of reading God's Word without asking man's leave, and without heeding man's prohibition. You remember how in the history of the

Christian Church there was a day, a long and dark day, in which the ban of Popery locked up the word of life from the knowledge and the reading of men at large: we must not forget that there has been a time, when to translate the Bible into the common tongue, and to read it in the hearing of common people, was an offence punished by law: and let it be remembered, too, that where the Church of Rome has sway, that day is yet. The authoritative teaching of that Church is, that no one shall presume to read the Scriptures without permission, in writing, from the priest: and that whoever without this permission shall read the Bible, shall be denied absolution of sin. Of course, *we* should hold that absolution very cheap, as being really worth exactly nothing: *we* go to God for the pardon of sin, and to Him only: but you can well imagine the influence of such a threat upon those who have been trained up in the belief that without priestly absolution there can be no forgiveness of sin: and it is notorious that in Roman Catholic countries the Bible is a sealed book. And we, my friends, who know something of its value; not merely of its value to tell us truth upon matters the most solemnly momentous we can ever know; but of its value to comfort, direct, enlighten,—of its value as a friend and companion day by day;—should we not thank God for those worthy champions in the cause of truth, who, in the strife of logic, in the dungeons of the Inquisition, and at the fiery stake, have toiled and

suffered to gain for us the privilege we possess, of turning to the pages of God's Word, when we will, where we will, and as often as we will.

And now, in the second place, for another thing as regards which we have entered into the quiet enjoyment of the fruit of other men's labours, let us think of our religious Creed.

Let us think, generally, of the Faith we hold: I mean, the entire system of Religion by which we hope to be guided through life, and at last to gain a place and an inheritance in heaven. How simple, clear, and easily understood, is our system of religion, —so far, at least, as concerns vital truths! How well every one among us may know how to be saved! There is no mystery: no perplexity: If any human being comes in deep anxiety and asks what he must do that he may escape God's wrath and gain God's friendship,—how he may escape from perdition and rise to glory,—the answer is ready at hand to give him: an answer to which we dare not add, and from which we dare not take: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." What an incalculable blessing and privilege it is, that we can so easily find out, and so readily understand, the whole way of salvation! But does not the thought sometimes arise in our hearts, that in doing this, we are reaping the fruit of manifold and mighty labour on the part of others? Should we not remember, that

it was not always so easy to find out the way in which the burdened conscience might have rest, and the guilty sinner pardon? Should not we oftentimes bethink us of the toil it cost some in days departed, to clear away the rubbish which men had, in the course of ages, heaped upon the simple "Believe on Christ:" to make it stand out, as it does now to our view, freed and disencumbered from the additions, the perversions, the crafty misrepresentations, the guilty contradictions, with which superstition, and priestcraft, and rationalism, had covered it over, and encrusted it round? Let us think of the labour it cost the Reformers of the Middle Ages and of the sixteenth century, —of the tears and blood it cost them,—of the racks and flames it cost them,—to draw forth the saving doctrine of Justification before God through faith in Christ, from the mass of forms, falsehoods, and absurdities which Romanism had superinduced upon this one way of salvation,—this article of a standing or a falling Church! Ah, brethren, when *we* so easily find the answer to the momentous question, what must I do to be saved: when *we* get that answer to it which we drew into our infant souls, as the very first and most indisputable of all truths: let us not forget how differently that question *has* been answered in many ages and many places: how the soul hungry for the bread of life has been fed with husks; how the soul roused to deep concern by the enlightening of the Holy Spirit, has had its apprehensions quieted, and

its fears smoothed down, not by the balm that heals, but by the anodyne that poisons. The day was, when the man who came to ask the recognised teacher of Christianity, the priest, what he must do to be saved, instead of getting for his answer the ready "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," got an answer perhaps such as this: "Oh you must go without food so many days in the week: you must rise before daybreak on the winter mornings: you must wear sackcloth: you must go barefoot: you must scourge yourself morning and evening: you must give up all your friends, and all earthly ties and concerns, and go to a convent or a monastery: you must away to the Holy Land, and never rest till you come back again, with the scallop-shell in your hat, and the faded palm-branch in your hand: you must broider the Red-Cross on your heart, and go sword in hand to fight for the possession of the Holy Sepulchre wherein the Redeemer slept." Now I know perfectly well, that by skilfully stating the case, an ingenious pleader might be able to show that a human being might be doing all these things, and yet be doing nothing directly inconsistent with a simple, saving trust in Jesus: and I willingly believe that many a soul, even in the darkest days of the Mediæval Church, was guided by the Holy Spirit into that simple, saving faith: and I trust there is no one here who would presume to say what amount or degree of doctrinal error is inconsistent with a human soul's sal-

vation: all I presume to say is, that these doings and observances have no warrant in what God tells us of the way of salvation;—that they assuredly tend, at least, in the direction of the belief that man can save himself;—and that an apostle has spoken in words of terrible force and earnestness of the guilt and peril of the man who should preach another gospel than that set forth in the Word of God. We *may* say that *that* false Gospel is soul-deceiving and soul-debasing: though it be not for us to say of any system of nominally Christian belief, that it is soul-destroying. But, when we think of the kind of answers that earnest men once got, when they sought to know the way of salvation: when we think of the stripes, the fastings, the vigils, the pilgrimages, the terrible apparatus of systematised torture, by which poor souls, convinced of their sinfulness, thought to make expiatory satisfaction to God for their sins: when we think how vain such things must have been to take sin away, or to bring to the burdened conscience any peace but the peace of miserable delusion: then how grateful we should be to Almighty God for that noble band of labourers and sufferers, who cleared Repentance towards God and Faith in Christ of the fripperies and tinsel of penances and works of satisfaction; and brought back by one great step the simple sublimity of that great precept, promise, and principle, which means, implies, and comprehends so much;—the "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!"

And now in the third place, as we sum up the religious privileges and advantages we owe to those who have gone before us, and as to which "other men laboured, and we are entered into their labours," how shall we forget the visible Church which gathers us within her arms: how shall we forget the establishment and organization of the beloved Church of our fathers? We claim for the Church of Scotland no infallibility, and no perfection: it may possibly have defects and inconveniences attending its government: it may please no class completely by its arrangements for the filling up of vacant charges,—though this, perhaps, does but show how fairly the balance is held between all: it may possibly have appointed a ritual whose severe simplicity is susceptible of enrichment: it may possibly, in its horror of all that had ever been tainted by Roman usage, have passed, by the natural swing of the pendulum, into the opposite extreme: But this we may boldly claim for our Church, that her standards set out sound and saving doctrine in plain words which admit no misconception: and I think, that when the question is fairly put, even the most æsthetic among us will admit, that a faithful gospel, faithfully set forth to the salvation of poor dying souls, is worth incomparably more than the noblest religious edifices and the stateliest services: that the sublimest Gothic vault, that windows which rival the northern sunset, that the pealing organ and the white-robed choristers,

are things not essential to the worship of Him, concerning whom our Redeemer told us, as the sum of truth about His worship, that "they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth:"—a worship which may be rendered as heartily in the plain little church among country graves and trees, as in the princeliest pile ever dedicated to the service of Almighty God. Let us think, then, how with each returning Sunday, the church-bell rings, and the church door is opened: we are invited to go up and worship our Maker, and to listen to the things that belong to our peace. And when we think how readily, if time had no such breaks in it, we should come, in the bustle of daily life, to neglect the life beyond the grave, let us not forget the labours of those faithful men, who founded our time-hallowed Zion;—who mapped out our country into its thousand parishes,—and set down in each one of them the sacred house where we might listen to the preached gospel, and where we might worship God. Yes, brethren: we have got so accustomed to all these things: they come in such a regular and commonplace fashion: that we hardly think of the advantages we enjoy, and scarcely remember our debt to those to whom we owe them. It is different in some places in this world! There are places where Scotch people, with the strong church-going habit, and the strong religious sense, are better able to judge of the worth of these established means of grace: because they have not

got them. And I do not remember many things more affecting, than the account I once heard given by one of the clergy of our Church who, a good many years since, were sent to visit the Scotch settlements in Canada, of the earnest desire expressed by the dwellers in many a remote clearing and rude log-hut in the backwoods, for a church in which they might worship God, and for a minister to preach to them the Gospel of Christ. I remember his telling how, after he had preached, for the first and the last time, in some remote clearing in those gigantic woods, to the little band whose hearts still were Highland, —they accompanied him some little distance on his way: old men with white hair, little children that had seldom heard the Sabbath-bell, mothers who knew that to grow up in the absence of the stated services of religion must go far to make *their* teaching of their little ones null and useless; and when at last they parted, how they watched him winding away along the path of which they thought only that it led to Scotland; and how the last faint echo that died upon his ear, bore with it the expression of the deep-felt want of that little band of exiles,—Remember us, and send us a minister!* Ah, brethren, we do not feel here,—we who have grown exacting in our standard of preaching, and who sometimes look for something

* The effect of the story, as told to a meeting of about 4000 people, was overwhelming. But the man who told it had the unmistakable divine gift. His name was Norman Macleod.

specially attractive to make us go to church at all,—we do not feel here what a blessing it is to have a church in which to assemble on God's day, no matter how humble; and the blessed gospel to listen to, though preached with ever so little brilliance or show. The blessing comes too cheaply: if it cost us more, we should understand its value better. Even as it is, we can see, if we think at all, that we owe a mighty debt to those earnest and faithful men, who thought of the unborn generations of Scotland; and toiled and prayed that a visible Church should stretch over us her arms, and that a preached gospel should be placed within our reach. There was hard labour, somewhere, before that end was reached. And surely if there be such a feeling as gratitude in our hearts, we cannot forget this day how much we owe to those who toiled that we might enjoy without toil the outward means of grace; and who, in blood and tears, laid the foundations of our Scottish Church.

Honour, then, to the dead! Honour to the nameless man, that hunted through convent chests, and stirred up the dust of centuries, to get the faded parchment that bore, it may be, the Gospel of St John! Honour to him that pored night and day over its dim cyphers, labouring to draw forth the just meaning of its every blessed word: till fair and clear, in our own familiar tongue, we have the words of

eternal life so that a child may read them. Honour to him that died in the dungeons of the Inquisition, for saying that all men should have leave, without let or hindrance from human being, to turn over the Bible's leaves, and to read every word they bear. For to each one of these men we are indebted somewhat, for the Bible that lies before us. For these men "laboured, and we are entered into their labours."

Honour to the dead! Honour to the sturdy monk, that scorned all compromise and all concession, when these were to touch the grand doctrine of Justification before God through Faith in Christ alone. Honour to the pale martyr, who looked unappalled on the torch and the faggots, and died for that foundation of the Christian's creed. Honour to every one, who with tongue or pen, has held forth his testimony, that the one way to be saved is to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." For to every one of these we are indebted somewhat for the clear system of Christian doctrine that commands our faith. For these "men laboured, and we are entered into their labours."

Honour to departed benefactors nearer still! Honour to the brave, earnest men, who mapped out the lines of the Church of our fathers! No doubt they were rough men. They had little about them of the aesthetical, and less of the sentimental. If they had possessed more of these, they would not have done so well for a rough, stern age. And to them we are indebted somewhat, yea, much,—for our national religion.

For they "laboured: and we are entered into their labours!"

My friends, it is good for us to think of these things. What cause for gratitude we have towards a kind God, who has appointed to us so great spiritual privileges! There are our open Bibles: there is our sound creed: there are our churches and our services: all gained for us by the labour and suffering of other men: all waiting for us at our birth, that we may enter into them as we come to need them. Now, who can think of these things, without recalling our Saviour's awful words, that tell how increased responsibility comes with increase of privilege? "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." Dear friends, we know God's will for our salvation: Nothing can be said to us that we do not know. And you have seen, this day, how very much has been given to us: surely much shall be required! Oh let us pray for the continual working upon our hearts of God's Holy Spirit, to give power and efficacy to all the means of grace. And so all these things which we owe to the labour of good Christian men who have gone before us, shall tend to make us meet, first, for God's service; and next, for God's rest!

XXII.

DAILY LIFE HALLOWED.

"Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God."—1 Cor. vii. 24.

I SUPPOSE, my friends, that there never was a word Christ said, with which the experience of all true Christians, and indeed the experience of all thinking men, more completely coincides and agrees, than when He said that the cares of this world oftentimes choke the good seed of religion in the heart, so that it becomes unfruitful. I suppose that many a one of us has sometimes thought to himself,—Oh, if I could only extricate myself from the thousand little cares and vexations and petty annoyances of my daily life;—if I could only off and away from all this bustle of business which day by day I must go through;—if I could only get to some quiet peaceful spot where these wearing and endless cares should all be quite forgotten,—where there would be no engagements to meet, and no ill-set remarks to listen to, and no impracticable people to have to deal with, and no worrying business to look after, and no perpetual recurrence of little annoyances, each perhaps

almost little enough to smile at, but all together making life so different a thing from our childish anticipations of it;—if I could only get to such a peaceful spot as *that*,—then what progress I should make in the divine life;—then how much better Christian I should be! If all these perpetually recurring worries, we sometimes think, did not chain us down to the earth, and engross our thoughts, and distract our prayers, and break in on our hours of solemn meditation:—if we could be always as free from the busy world, as we were when we were recovering from some long illness,—or when we were staying far away in some lonely seaside spot;—then we should have far more of the divine life in us: religion would be far more the great occupation of our existence: our faith would be stronger; our love to our Saviour would be deeper; our Christian temper would be equable and serene.

Well, *that* was just the idea that sprang up long ago in the mediæval Church; and that led to the institution of the Monastic Life. People remembered that Christ had said that the cares of the world choke the word: People felt in their own experience how engrossing a thing worldly care was: People felt, what I am quite sure every one of you that is trying to live a Christian life must feel, that when one's mind is very much taken up with the pressing affairs of this world, one is very likely quite to forget the next. They thought that true religion was a thing

that died out in the atmosphere of a worldly calling, even as the body's life is quenched in the choke-damp of the mine: They judged it impossible for any one to be an earnest and devoted Christian, walking with God day by day; and at the same time to be a pushing business-man, a shrewd lawyer, a skilful artificer: they fancied, in short, that worldly care was so sure to choke the good seed,—was a thing so poisonous to the soul's life,—that the best way was to give up the battle with that soul-destroying thing; and fly from an enemy which was sure to vanquish you if you fought with it. And though I am sure that none of us have the least favour or liking for any part of the errors of old days, I cannot yet but confess, that there was something that looked beautiful in the idea of a number of humble Christian men, who had felt the world's power to do harm, —who had found how it drew down and materialised their souls,—who had felt how hard it was amid the bustle of life, to keep the flame of vital religion burning upon the altar of their hearts,—who had turned away from the herd of men, wounded like the stricken deer,—oh, there was something beautiful in the idea of a little company of such humble Christian men, withdrawing quite from that ensnaring and seducing world,—wisely flying from a danger which they could not brave,—going away to some sweet secluded glade, where the gray walls of the monastery rose over the ancient trees, and the noble spire pointed heaven-

wards through the blue summer sky; and there, calmly and evenly, in peaceful meditation and religious observances,—all their life dedicated to Christ, and every hour with its appointed devotion,—passing gently through this life, and gently downwards to a quiet grave. Beautiful, indeed, and solemn in the fancy, seems that refuge from a stormy world; where, amid the gorgeous light of richly storied windows, and the echoes of fretted roofs,—between the chapel with its yellow lights and its chanted praises,—and the simple cell, so peaceful and so quiet,—life flowed on pleasantly as the country stream, that murmured by the ivied walls.

But all this, I need hardly tell you, is the fair side of the picture. I need not remind you how different the reality was;—how entirely all this that we have been saying is what some folk would call an idealised representation. I need not remind you how the true characteristics of what was meant to have been the model Christian life, came to be stolid ignorance, and brutal excess, and heartless formality, and hateful hypocrisy:—how what was intended for a pure and peaceful retreat from the bad world around, turned in some cases to a receptacle for everything impure, and hateful, and vile. But without reminding you at any length of all *that*, it may suffice for us to know, that this way of leading a Christian life, was not St Paul's way. *He* did not approve of flying away from *this* world, in order to prepare the better for the next.

He spoke, it need not be said, by the direction of the Holy Spirit: yet when he wished to tell his Corinthian brethren how they might best lead the spiritual life, he does not say,—Away from your bustling city,—away to the convent cell or the hermit's cave,—away to scenes where you will have no business to look after, and no profession to study, and no family to provide for; and *there* do your best to imitate your Saviour,—*then* strive your hardest to live the life of the righteous, and then like the righteous to die. No such thing! St Paul thought that earthly care might be made a discipline for eternity: St Paul thought that the believer might so breast this world's temptations, and so go through this world's cares, as that his heaven might be the happier and his eternal crown the brighter: He would not have Christians leave this world's places of honourable exertion and right enjoyment to mere worldly men: He would rather have it, that the true believer should feel, that it was God who had set him in his place in life,—that to *that* place God had *called* him,—that God calls some men to serve Him in the counting-house and the workshop, as decidedly as He calls others to serve Him in the pulpit and at the altar,—that it is possible to do the commonest drudgery, so only it be right drudgery, for the Saviour's sake. "Brethren," he says,—"let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God!"

I ask you especially to attend to the last words of

the text. St Paul tells his Christian friends at Corinth that they ought to consider that God had placed them in the position of life which they occupied,—whatever *that* might be; and so that in this position they ought contentedly to abide, discharging its duties as well as they could: but in this position it was not enough that they should merely abide:—they were "therein to abide *with God*." They were to keep their religion with them through all their daily business: they were to testify by all they did that they were disciples of Jesus: it was not merely now and then at a communion-table,—it was not merely when they were specially called on to make a confession of their faith,—it was not only on these grand sort of occasions that they were to give proof that they were Christians in very truth: but every hour of their life, and in every transaction of their worldly business, they were to endeavour so to behave, as that any person who spent even a few minutes in their company, should go away saying to himself,—"Now *that* man is a Christian: there is no mistake about it: he shews he is by his entire deportment." And to bring about such a state of things, St Paul thought it a good plan to say something that would imply, that would take for granted rather than assert,—that there is a sanctity and a solemnity about every right occupation in which a Christian soul may be engaged,—because to that occupation every Christian soul is *called* by God. We do not drop by chance into our places in life. It is

not left to the chapter of accidents, where a man is to be, and what he is to do, through his days on earth. Where you and I are placed, it is God that put us: it is God that keeps us there: and there we may, and there we ought to, abide with God. Of course the Apostle did not mean that any man should remain in a sinful position;—it is *not* God that puts any one in a place where his business is to do wrong: and any position where we are necessitated or even very strongly tempted to do what is sinful, ought in Christian prudence where not in Christian principle, to be left at once. And of course, too, the Apostle did not mean to say that we ought not to try and mend our circumstances, and rise to a better worldly position than we occupied before: we may justifiably abide in our calling, but we are not tied to it if we can do better. Both these exceptions, I fancy, your own common sense would suggest. But there is no mistaking the grand idea which St Paul wishes in the text to set before us: he wants us to understand that in every right position, no matter how humble, so only it be not wrong, a man may keep his religion along with him; a man may do everything he does, on Christian principle, and for his Master's sake. Brethren, there is a holiness about common life, when a tinge of earnest Christianity runs through it all;—runs, like a golden thread, through a man's whole thinking, and speaking, and acting. Quaintly, but truly, has the old divine and poet

said, "Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws, makes that and the action fine!" And there is something, too, that falls grateful and inspiriting upon the heart, in the truth my text takes for granted, that you and I have not dropped from the clouds into the places we fill in life; but that, in sober reality, we have been each one of us solemnly *called* to them by God. Now how much better we should do our work, however humble it might be, if we ever kept the thought before us, that we are placed here by God that we might do it! Never forget, my friends, that lowly as your lot may be, and unobserved your toil,—though it should be something as small as to weed fields or garden walks,—though you should be what it always touches me to hear described as "just a labourer,"—still, if you are truly Christ's,—not more really has their solemn ordination called the Ministers of the Cross to labour in God's husbandry, than your Saviour's voice has called *you* to labour in your lowly vocation, and to do all your work as for Him. No presbyter, no bishop, fills an office in itself more really sacred than yours! Just think, how carefully and well we should each do our daily task, if every morning it were measured out and appointed to us by Christ himself; if He Himself told us that it was His wish and His purpose that we were to do exactly such and such work; and that He would stay by us all the time we did it; and that He looked to us to recommend His faith to all who saw us, by doing our work more faithfully and

better than any unconverted man would do it; and that He would reckon as so much done to Himself, whatever we might do. Well, and is not all this just a statement of what the case really is? Are we not *called* by our Saviour to fill the place we actually hold: are we not bidden to show ourselves His disciples by the manner in which we fill it? Yes, truly: for nothing less than all this is taught us by these words of the great Apostle, addressed first to believers who lived and died long hundreds of years since in that busy old Grecian city; but addressed no less to us who are living in this summer time in this town and parish,—"Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God!"

I think that in these sentences I have in a general way brought out what is the teaching of the Holy Spirit in the words of this text. But in the case of any important doctrine of Scripture, it should always be a profitable and an interesting thing, to rest for a while in the contemplation of the great truth; and separately to consider the truths which seem involved in it. And in prosecuting the subject for a little longer, let me ask you to attend carefully to two thoughts, which appear to me of a very practical nature; and which seem as if naturally suggested by this precept of St Paul.

The first of these is, that earthly cares and occupations are not necessarily fatal to the divine life: it

does not of necessity follow that our worldly occupation, however busy a one it may be, is to be something that will always be pulling us down from any elevation of piety;—always standing in the way of our loving Christ, and believing in Him, and serving Him, and imitating Him, as we ought to do. In plain words: however busy you are; and however many cares you may have to perplex you, about your business, and your children, and your domestic affairs; this need not keep you from being a living Christian. Each one of you, though you are working away from morning to night at your occupation,—whatever that may be,—may be just as pious and as devout a believer, as if you were living in a monastery or a convent. If it were otherwise;—if the cares of a worldly calling necessarily "choked the word," and drew you down from all thought about your spiritual state;—if you found that you *could not* mingle in the society of this world, without utterly neglecting your preparation for the next;—then, indeed, you had better, far better, abandon it. If to engage in this life's business, or to mingle in this life's society, were a thing you could do only by paying the price of your immortal soul;—then indeed you had better away at once to the monastic dwelling, and wear out life idly there. But no! It is quite true, the cares of this world *do* often choke the word; and still oftener stunt its growth when they do not quite choke it: in practice they are found to do so: and no doubt they have a tendency to

do so. But they need not necessarily produce any such effect. We might so employ all our worldly cares, as not only to make sure that they should not ruin our spiritual life; but even so as to make these very worldly cares draw us nearer to God. You know that God has placed each of us in the position we occupy; and yet He has said to us, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." Now God would not have bidden us do this, if it had been impossible to do it. And St Paul in this text shows us how to do it. "Let every man," he says, "wherein he is called, therein abide *with God:*" that is, bring your Saviour into all your daily business,—bring your religion into all these unavoidable and ever-recurring cares; and so shall your religion leaven all your life: so shall all these cares which God in His providence has laid upon you, be changed from being enemies of spirituality into means of growing grace and advancing sanctification. Now I never wish, in preaching to you, to talk in general terms which mean nothing very definitely: and still more especially would I avoid *that*, in dwelling upon this matter. When I speak of bringing our Saviour into our daily cares, so as to do what St Paul advises in the text, and thus so as to catch an adverse gale in such a manner as may make it speed us heavenwards; my meaning is *this;* and I shall best explain it by an example. Suppose on any day, you have some difficult piece of work to do, or some disagreeable business to go through. Suppose at your morning devotions you try to offer prayers

for spiritual blessings, perhaps,—for things you don't at the time so much feel your want of;—and say nothing of this vexation or toil before you, because you think it too small a matter to trouble God with;—why, I will tell you what will happen. Your mind will be wandering away all the time that you are trying to pray: your devotion will be cold and heartless: you will be thinking of the disagreeable employment before you, while you are fruitlessly praying for things you are at the moment not really desiring: *That* worldly care will choke *that* morning's "word." Well, but take God into it. Do not keep your Saviour outside. Just remember that whatever is great enough to interest you, is great enough to interest your Saviour. Think that not a sparrow falls without His notice: think that not a hair on the believer's head is unreckoned: And just tell Christ all about your anxiety in your prayer; make *that* the subject of your prayer which is really uppermost in your thoughts: and so the cold burden will be taken from your heart;—so will your prayer be earnest and heartfelt;—and so will your worldly care draw you nearer to your God! Now *that*, my friends, is what I think St Paul intended, when he bade us abide in our common business "with God." The Apostle would have us feel that our Saviour feels an interest in it all: He would have us ask Him for help in it all. He would have us feel that there is nothing that can befal us, to disquiet or to perplex, that is too little to be confided

to our Saviour: He would have each little trouble of the heart, as it rises, breathed into the Saviour's ear: He would have us ever ready to pray for God's help in the smallest matter as in the greatest,—in the curbing of a little hasty temper,—in the management of a little piece of daily business,—just as well as in the weightier matters of strife with great temptation, and of progress in the way to heaven. And so, instead of our worldly cares closing (as it were) round the flame of heart-devotion and extinguishing it, they will fan it. So shall those countless little things which now come so jarringly across our Christian progress, give each its onward impetus to that great advancing tide, which is bearing on towards holiness and bliss those happy souls for whose eternal good "all things" (worry and all) are bound to "work together." So shall our religion be not a thing by itself,—for then, though a great thing, it will be just one thing;—but so shall it be a thing linked with and pervading everything else: so shall it be a LIFE: and so shall we have attained to something like what St Paul was aiming at and wishing for when he said, "Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide *with God!*"

Another truth which is taught us by the text is this: that the lowliest and commonest lot affords room for the exercise of all the Christian graces. I defy any of you to say with truth, Now I wish to be a far

better Christian than I am; and I would be a far better Christian than I am; if it were not that I am cribbed and confined by circumstances; my Christian life has not room for its development in this lowly lot: if I were placed in a more elevated and commanding position, and in a wider sphere, then I should have greater room for the exercise of faith, and hope, and charity, and patience, and all the graces of the divine life. Now that is not true. We all know quite well, that in this world's affairs, and in the exercise of intellectual ability, there may be such a thing as a man's failing to rise to the eminence he merits, through not having a field for the display of his powers. As for instance, we can all see that a man with more than the military genius of Napoleon may live and die unknown, if he live in times of profound peace. Another with more than the poetic fire of Shakspere may die "mute and inglorious," because circumstances held him down: and many a man, in many a walk of life, who had in him the makings of great and good things, may have passed from this world leaving no trace behind him, because his lot forbade his advance to world-wide fame. There may have been a Mendelssohn that never composed a note: a Follett that never held a brief: a Disraeli that remained a lawyer's clerk: a Guthrie that never preached to a congregation that valued him. But it is not thus in the matter of Christian grace. It does not need a large theatre for *its* display. We do not need to sound the

trumpet, and spread the wing, and rouse the slumbering world: we do not need to call thousands of men to look on,—we do not need to wait for the coming of some great occasion, that shall give us room for the exercise of faith, or charity, or patience, or humility. Nay, but in our common duties,—*here*, where we are called by God,—we have ample space and verge enough for the exercise of every grace that can adorn the true believer. We may do the least thing on Christian principle and for Christ's sake, as well as the greatest: and the lowliest lot will furnish us with room for the display of every grace that the Blessed Spirit can work in us.

> The trivial round, the common task,
> Will furnish all we ought to ask:
> Room to deny ourselves; a road
> To bring us, daily, nearer God.

Yes, up to the point of martyrdom, we may find scope in our daily life. In fighting the good fight of faith, in crucifying the affections of the heart, in ruling our spirit, in holding serenely on through all the countless little irritations and annoyances of domestic life, in punctuality and faithfulness in the discharge of little duties,—we may find abundant space for showing the reality of our religion, and proving its strength. Oh brethren, day by day we may be making a sacrifice of feeling, requiring more heroism than it would to go for once to the stake! You may be

accustomed to speak with men,—homely, commonplace looking men and women,—who have in them the spirit of martyrs;—aye, and who are exercising that spirit, too. And let me tell you, if you fall behind the very chiefest of the Apostles,—if you do not display the faith of Paul and the love of John and the mind of Christ,—it is not because you have not the opportunity: it is not because you might not, living in this town, and working at your daily toil, and mingling with your daily companions, show it all. We might, my brethren, every one of us,—we have God's own word for it;—we might, every one of us, "wherein we are called, therein abide with God!"

Such, then, are some thoughts upon this precept of St Paul, which I have already so often repeated: and now, as I draw another Sunday's sermon to a close, it seems to me as if this text cast some light upon another sentence uttered by that same great Apostle, when he said that he had "learned, in whatsoever state he was, therewith to be content." I suppose it sometimes seems strange to some of you, when thoughts come back on you of fancies and anticipations of early days, which experience has sobered down. I suppose there is hardly one of us here, who is now in just such a position as he or she fancied and looked forward to in childhood's visionary days. I suppose that when we look round upon the fields and the waters of "the school-boy spot, we ne'er forget, though we are there forgot,"—

there may come, like fragrance from roses dead, or like music from strings long since mouldered,—some reminiscence of days when we fancied how we should startle the world with the echoes of our fame, or dreamt dreams of an unclouded happiness in the society of those who have passed away from this earth, amid scenes over which there spread a light such as never was on land or sea: and it may seem strange enough now to look round on our common-place lot, with its perpetual fretting cares, and its ever-recurring toil, and so intensely matter-of-fact as it is: and then to compare it with these early fancies. But yet, if it be true, that lowly as our lot may be, we may therein "abide with God:" if all these ceaseless cares are meant to school us for eternity: if in all we do and bear we may have the Saviour for a sympathising and ever-present friend; and testify our faith and love towards Him by every hour of our life: if in any lawful vocation whatsoever we may cultivate and display every Christian grace: and if a humble believing life in this place or in any place may be the portal to that glorious home we call Heaven: if there is nothing in our outward circumstances to keep you or me from believing in Jesus as strongly as St Paul did, and loving Him as deeply as St John did and winning a crown as bright as theirs;—then, brethren, in God's name, "let every one of us, wherein we are called, therein contentedly abide with God!"

NEWTON-ON-AYR, *July* 24, 1853.

XXIII.

THE PERPETUITY OF THE WORDS OF CHRIST.

"Heaven and earth shall pass away; but My words shall not pass away."—ST MATT. xxiv. 35.

IT would have been a strange thing to have looked at the Redeemer, as He said these words. The contrast was great between His lowly aspect and surroundings, and the daring tone of what He says. They would have been bold words,—or else the words of small experience,—if they had been spoken by the highest of mankind, in the hour of his chiefest exaltation. But how it would have startled a chance bystander, whose ear might have been caught by the high-sounding sentence, just to have turned round, and seen what manner of man it was that said it! There He is, such as on earth He was: not seen, as we see Him, in the glory of all we know: merely human in look, in dress, in weariness: after-generations set the aureole round the Head which wore none here: lowly in what could be learnt of the manner and scenes of His childhood's growth, of His

manhood's occupations: and meanwhile homeless and poor. Yet listen to the words; and mark the contrast with His appearance. The lowly wanderer speaks: but they are not lowly words that come from His lips: They are confident and lofty words: never did man speak more confidently or loftily. "Heaven and earth shall pass away;—but My words shall not pass away."

You remember the place and time: we know them accurately. He is sitting on the green slope of the Mount of Olives: and there, across the narrow vale, stretching over its hill, stands in its beauty the sacred and renowned Jerusalem. Gleaming white against a sky of brighter blue than we know here, with its mighty foundations and its glittering pinnacles, rises God's Temple. We know the season: the beautiful and hopeful Spring. We know the company: it is but a little band of humble men that listens, as the Redeemer foretells the doom of the city and temple; and, taking a farther prospect, solemnly indicates farther and more awful things. And now, as seeing perhaps some shade of doubt falling upon the faces of those who heard Him; He says, as repressing the first signs of it, and asseverating all He had said before,—"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away!"

Now here we have a fair and bold comparison of two things: one which seems the slightest and most evanescent you can think of; another which seems

the very ideal of all that is substantial and durable. Here are on the one side a few words, and on the other side the great solid world. What more fleeting, we should say, than a few articulated syllables, vibrating each on the ear for its second, and then dying away: what more everlasting than this gigantic world we live on? Yet the Saviour dares the comparison. He looks upon the ancient hill on which He sat, with its massive foundations round which the Kedron flows: He looks abroad over fair Judea, with its vine-clad hills and fruitful vallies: He carries His view beyond its frontiers over the breadths of the wide world. And then, turning from this earth, He looks upon the immensity above, peopled with innumerable orbs amid whose hosts this earth is like a grain of sand: and thus measuring the limits of creation, He speaks the words that make my text. He invites the comparison between the endurance of the words He utters; and the endurance of the stars, the earth, and the ocean.

There is no doubt that the words which our Saviour had specially in His mind, were those of the prophecy which is given in the earlier part of the chapter in which the text stands. That prophecy refers immediately to the destruction of Jerusalem: and there are expressions in it whose fulfilment must perhaps be sought in the final Judgment of the world. But the declaration which Christ makes in the text is one whose meaning we may extend much farther than *that*. We may understand the verse in its literal meaning:

as applying to all things that proceeded from the lips of Christ. It is in this sense that I ask you at this time to understand it; as signifying that the words of our Redeemer, generally, have proved and will prove as enduring as this verse says. I mean to show you that Christ's words have not passed away: will not pass away with this world: will never pass away.

It is approaching towards two thousand years since the days of Christ's three-years' ministry on earth. Ages are measured out since He spake with His human voice those words of wisdom and mercy the like of which man never spake: and it is many a day, indeed, since His words in the prosaic literalness have 'passed away;' have ceased to stir the audible pulses of the air; have passed to silence. You might sit upon the Mount of the Beatitudes, yet catch no lingering echo of the long-hushed Voice (how strange it would be to hear it) which preached the sermon which every Christian memory keeps diligently: You might wander to-day upon the Mount of Olives, yet find no memorial to the outward ear of the counsels, prayers, and last blessing which have made that hill sacred: You might kneel, like Him, beneath the gnarled trees of that little enclosure which all Christendom knows as Gethsemane, yet catch no whisper of those bitter words which expressed the Agony which wrought our salvation: and the treasured Sayings which through the hours of the Crucifixion stirred the air of darkened Calvary have

utterly passed away, so far as concerns their power of reaching the outward ear. Yet, though no magic was impressed on the syllables which flowed from the lips of the Redeemer, to arrest their natural "passing away,"—to keep them from sinking into silence like those uttered by common men; still it is true and certain that in that further sense in which He meant the expression to be understood, they have not passed away, and cannot pass away while the world stands. For one thing, they have not passed away, these words of Christ, in this sense; that when they were spoken, the simple narrative of the Evangelists took and perpetuated them: and in these four Gospels, which stand first among the books of New Testament Scripture, we have very many of Christ's words preserved: not "passed away:" abiding yet in all their living power: each one as an arrow in the hand of God's Spirit to pierce the sinful, obdurate heart. And so in this sense the Redeemer's words abide with us: the prediction in the text has been verified to the spirit: His blessed words had not done their work when they had fallen on the ear of those to whom He first addressed them: They were not done with when they had melted into silence as His voice ceased to speak. Who shall tell us that the Sermon on the Mount was never preached but once? It may be true enough it was but the one time the lips of Jesus uttered it: Half-an-hour, perhaps, and it was done: But have not millions listened to that sermon since?

Has it not been listened to in every Christian country, times innumerable? Has not each of us many a time heard it preached? Is it not true, that even now, we have but to open our Testaments at the fifth of St Matthew: and again the multitudes spread around the hill: again the Judean sky smiles on the gracious Face we should know anywhere: again that Voice, that human Voice, which was the Voice of the Divine Creator, begins with that catalogue, so familiar now, so original and eccentric then, of those who are truly blessed: again we are taught after what manner to pray, though we have but lamely learnt it: again the sermon is preached from end to end, and His words fall like music on the heart. Then come down over the story of His life: note how His golden words are rescued from the doom of forgetfulness: how they live, life-like as ever, upon the perpetually-read page. We think it a wonderful tribute to human genius, to have read its best fruits five or six times: but hundreds of times are few to have read, or repeated over, the story of the poor Prodigal Son, the story of the nameless yet most renowned Good Samaritan! Have they passed away, the words that tell where rest may be found by every weary soul in a weary world: the words, kept by dying ears, that take the blankness from the region behind the Veil, telling of many mansions, of a Father's House, of a place prepared by the brotherly Saviour, the Resurrection

and the Life, in Whom whoso believes shall never die as they then thought death : the words that have cheered the half-despairing, the "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out :" the words that have marvellously strengthened worker and sufferer, the "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world!" Are they gone, the words that have told sorrowful ages of that Blessed Comforter, Who came in kindliest sympathy and divinest mightiness to an unworthy Church, many ways needing Him sorely, and, for all unworthiness, will never leave it till the last: Are they gone, the "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you :" is it vanished, the great gospel truth, that "This is life eternal, that they may know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent?" But I cannot let myself go upon this line. It would take very long indeed, to recal to you half those sentences which have grown familiar in our mouths as household words : which are the little child's first remembrance, and the aged pilgrim's last stay : which are prized and cherished like no other words that ever were said, by the best and worthiest of human kind : which are fresh to-day, amid the changed views of a changing world, and never get out of date or behind the thinking of the age. Nor is there trace of any failure in their vital power, or of any narrowing of the circle within which they are known and mighty. They are less likely now to pass away than ever. There never was a time

wherein the Word of God was being so multiplied: when the pages that bear Christ's words, and whose great value lies in this, that they bear Christ's words, were being scattered in such countless numbers over the world. There are a thousand Bibles now, for every one that was but a few years since: No one, not the poorest, need want one who desires one. And we may hope that the day is near in which every man and woman throughout this empire will be able to read the Bible for himself.

But it is a little thing to say that Christ's words were perpetuated on paper. We should not set much store by the fact that upon printed pages by millions and millions the words of our Redeemer have outlived the storms and the wear of ages: we should not mind much about *that* if it stood by itself: But take it with this, that these words are so marvellously adapted to the needs of our immortal nature, that those who have once felt their value, and received them in their power, would feel it was parting with life to part with them. They are the words which are "able to make wise unto salvation:" they are "the words of eternal life:" kindliest counsel, best consolation, immortal hope, all are there. Earthquakes and deluges might sweep this world; but you must unpeople it, before the words of Christ could pass away from it. Deeper and deeper leavening the thought and feeling of the Race: wider and wider

spreading the sphere of their influence; these blessed words abide. They have left their trace in many a place where they are little thought of: They have informed the prudence of merely human moralists: they have directed the makers of merely human laws. We cannot reckon how even as regards this life, they have wrought to elevate and humanize mankind. They have taken such a hold of this world, and of the hearts of the immortal creatures who dwell in it, that it is impossible that while the world stands they should pass away. And if by some strange magic you could so sweep away the words of our Divine Master,—so extirpate the printed pages on which they stand,—so efface them from man's memory,—as that people should forget they were ever spoken: even *then* they would not have passed away. They have leavened the thinking and purified the heart of utter unbelievers: They have tempered the polity of godless nations, and therein abide and stand: and in many gracious charities of deed and thought: in a general enlightenment, softening, and lifting up, which is wide as civilization: in the kindliest and best thoughts of the best men and women: in all these things and manifold more, the Sermon on the Mount would live and work on, and the parting Discourse and Prayer, though by some dismal miracle the words best worth remembering that ever were spoken came to be clean forgot!

But further: Not merely will the words of Christ stand while the world stands: they will see the world out. In the most exact meaning of the prediction, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but His words shall not pass away." After the present earth is gone, these words will abide. It may be that our Saviour's meaning was merely that sooner should heaven and earth pass, than His words fail of their full accomplishment. But you may take the text without a figure. Christ's words cannot pass away,—cannot (that is) turn as if they had never been,—as long as saved and sanctified human souls continue to exist: and that is, we know, for ever. There will be a day, when the earth shall have passed through the fires of the last conflagration, and the old heaven been rolled away like a scroll: but even then the Redeemer's words will be fresh in the memory of the glorified and redeemed. There, more vividly than ever here, the Blessed Spirit, who was to bring all things to remembrance, whatsoever Christ had spoken, will surely bring these blessed words to mind. We know, by assured testimony, that Christ's works upon earth are never forgotten in the peaceful life which we understand so dimly: we know the new song; "Thou art worthy, for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood:" and in all that sublime praise we read the assurance, that the spirits of just men made perfect dwell fondly on every particular of His life below, on every merciful deed, on every blessed word.

We may well believe that every syllable He said on earth is treasured up above, with a devotion far transcending what we know here. As the mariner prizes the chart that guided him through perils on distant seas; and in the evening of his days, when his voyages are done, looks with unfailing interest on that memorial of days departed: even so may the blessed soul, safe in the haven of eternal rest, recur often and often to those gracious words of the Redeemer which in many a perplexity, many a temptation, many a sorrow, held up, and kept right, and in the end brought where sorrows, temptations, and perplexities are gone.

There is yet another sense in which it may be said that Christ's words will endure in the mansions of the blest for ever. Though the last Bible perished, as perish it may, in the wreck and ruin of this world: though the blessed words of Jesus were to do what they never can,—fade utterly from the remembrance of the glorified soul: even then these words would live on in the effects they had produced. They would live and last in Heaven, in the souls they had brought there: in their justification before God, in the purity of their renewed natures, in their changeless and never-ending peace. You know how truly it may be said that words have not passed away, if their results and effects yet remain. There is no fashion in which a fleeting thing like a word may be said so properly to

be perpetuated and eternized, as in some result of it; some change produced by it; which will last for ever. You know, God's words that framed and fashioned this world were spoken very long ago: ages since, in one sense, they passed away. But then, their results remain: the effect, the doing of those creating words, still spread around us in this wide creation: and who will say that those words are as though they had never been spoken, so long as around us, beneath us, above us, there abide the great immensity and the manifold forms they made? And, even so, we may say that the words of Christ, spoken in this world, can never pass away: for after heaven and earth are gone, that sky above us and this world around us, those words will be perpetuated in the blissful purity of souls they saved: They will live yet, these merciful yet warning words, in the endless rest of many, once weary and heavy-laden; in the beatific vision of many, once sinful and miserable, now pure in heart and able to look upon God. And looking back from the Paradise above upon the troublesome and dangerous earthly pilgrimage, many a blest soul will trace to some never-forgotten saying of our Blessed Redeemer, carried home by the Blessed Holy Spirit, the outset of that better life which culminated gloriously there: the secret of that faithful service which by God's grace led to the crown. We know *that* of a surety: because from the last step in this life such have so testified, just entering within the Veil. There has been one

who said, It was the story of the poor prodigal that gave me heart to believe that not even my sad sins could shut me from God's infinite mercy: that made me arise and go to my Father in heaven. There has been one who said, It was the parable of the Talents that stirred me up to faithfully improve my committed trust: It was the "Ye have done it unto Me" that bore me through unrequited toils of disappointing charity: It was the Rich Man and Lazarus that solemnly warned against a ruinous belief in a God of mercy Who was really a God of weakness and untruth: and in the Pharisee and the Publican I found my first true prayer.

Our Master's words, like His deeds, were for the most part of comfort and mercy: yet when the occasion came, Christ could speak severely. No one could rebuke the false pretence of religion more sharply: No one caution more awfully to flee from the wrath to come. You remember too,—and it is fit conclusion to these thoughts,—how strongly the Redeemer spoke of the safety and happiness of the man who should hear His sayings and do them; and of the folly and ruin of the man who should hear His sayings and do them not. Do we hear and do them? It is a small matter that their pathos touches our heart, and their wisdom commends itself to our best judgment. Do we believe Him, saying He came to save us, lost and wandered away? Do we seek daily for the Spirit Whom